FROM FIELDS TO FULFILLMENT

MY JOURNEY

JIM SMITH

To my future descendants, may this memoir serve as a bridge across time. Just as I've cherished discovering traces of those who came before me, I hope these words offer you a glimpse into my life and the world I knew. May our stories connect us, bringing a sense of belonging and continuity to all who walk this path after me.

PREFACE

> Sometimes the slightest things change the directions of our lives, the merest breath of a circumstance, a random moment that connects like a meteorite striking the earth. Lives have swiveled and changed direction on the strength of a chance remark.
>
> — Bryce Courtenay

Like millions of others who are part of my generation, I've had a "before and after" life. I was born in the first half of the post-World War II baby boom, which is where the "baby boomer" label came from. In the last few years, members of my generation have been referred to by the shorthand term "boomer." More significant to me, however, is my life before and after a different demarcation point: February 2, 1972.

In February of '72, the Vietnam War (its unofficial name) raged on without an end in sight. Equally important, the protests against the war were ongoing. In fact, an event known as the Kent State shootings prompted the song "Four dead in Ohio," by the popular band Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young. We didn't know it at the time, but we were in the middle of the classic rock period. "Topical music" written by some of the generation's most famous and revered musicians was at its peak. Hippies were "a thing," but in a far-off place called Haight-Ashbury, or so we thought.

In the same era, we had boxy TV sets that would have different quality of images depending on how we twisted the antenna. Telephones were solidly wired to walls. Primitive computers existed but were only used by large institutions.

When the Vietnam War began, it was a skirmish most people didn't know much about. Then, when the draft directly affected the lives of millions of young men and the war escalated, along with rising casualties, great demand existed to revamp the draft to make it more fair, hence a lottery-by-birthday. On February 2, 1972, a random bouncing ball changed the course of my life.

My birthday, September 12, was number 43, a low number in a total of 365 possibilities. It's like the Chinese proverb that we translate to: *Good luck, bad luck, who knows?* After all, in the way of things, each bad event could lead to a good outcome, and the reverse is also true.

So, that's why this is my story in two parts: Before pulling #43 and After. Each individual has a unique story–many have a before and after event–and this is mine. I wrote this memoir because, at heart, I'm a genealogist first. It's a thrill to come across an old letter, like the one my grandmother wrote to her husband who was a cook in World War I and served in France. I'm excited when I discover a new relative, locate an ancestor's vital record, or read letters my relatives wrote generations ago. Even if they're talking about the price of chickens and the weather, they come alive in a way that sterile names and dates can never achieve.

I hope that one of my great-grandchildren finds this peek into my history interesting. If closer relatives, friends, and curious strangers get something out of it, all the better. If future generations stumble across this memoir, they'll get a picture of a profoundly interesting time of rapid change and discover that one of their ancestors was an active participant in some of those changes.

Along with leaving behind a record of an era and genealogical information, I have an interesting story to tell. I may have been born in a time of expanding opportunity in the United States, but I had a rough, humble start, which makes my journey one of both great struggle and reward. I grew up in modest circumstances on a dairy farm in north-central Illinois, in a house infested with an abusive, alcoholic, drug-using father. As I sit here in a nice house in Del Mar, California, like the Talking Heads, a 1970s rock band, I ask, "Well, how did I get here?" In fact, life has worked out well for me.

I would characterize my story as one of hope–and one that offered open doors and second chances. I was married with two children while receiving welfare and food stamps before graduating from Stanford (with a master's degree) and, later in my life, selling a company to Yahoo!

Along the way, I've traveled the world, pursued countless activities and interests, and learned many lessons. The most important lesson of all is the great value in offering forgiveness for the bad times. While this isn't a how-to book, take this lesson to heart, and first, forgive your parents. Even if you think they were lousy parents, they were doing the best they knew how to at the time. Forgiveness also opens the door to deep gratitude and allows us an opportunity to be thankful for all the good times.

> Sometimes the road less traveled is less traveled for a reason.
>
> — Jerry Seinfeld

CHAPTER 1

WHERE IT BEGAN

My father taught me to work; he did not teach me to love it.
— Abraham Lincoln

I was born in 1953, the same year Dwight Eisenhower became the U.S. president. Coincidentally, DNA had just been discovered, an important leap that helped drive my eventual interest in genealogy. The country was in the thick of the so-called Cold War, and the population was growing rapidly as the post war baby boom continued. In any era, however, my birth would have been kindly called “inauspicious.”

I was born in Monroe, Wisconsin, but my family lived on Best Road, just north of a small town, Durand, Illinois. We lived with a man named Stanley Knutson, a retired farmer. Stanley was a nice man, but the house itself was “humble” even for that time. Essentially a white two-story cube, it had electricity, but no running water or indoor toilet. Maybe because it lacked modern conveniences, I became an expert on what I call “conservation of all things.” That includes doing laundry. To start, we had to haul in water to heat on the stove. We washed in one bucket, rinsed in another, and then hung everything on a clothesline to dry. No washer-dryer for us, which also meant that unlike today, we wore our clothes a lot longer before they were tossed into the laundry pile. I still think my parents had the right idea about that.

I have sharp memories about what occupied Mom's time, namely, all things domestic. She took care of the basics of life for me and my older siblings, so when I think back on my childhood days I see Mom cooking, baking, cleaning, and doing the family bookkeeping. On the other hand, it isn't clear what Dad did. He had a few heifers that presumably grazed around the farm, but that couldn't possibly have occupied all of his time. He did make time to visit the local tavern.

Jim, Carolyn, Sue, Frank, Ray Smith dressed up for the 100 year celebration of Davis Illinois. We were living in the house that one of the founders, S. J. Davis lived in.

Dad and his time on that farm isn't the end of the story of Dad and me, or with the whole family. He figured in my life in important and not necessarily positive ways, which I'll talk about later.

LIFE ON A DAIRY FARM

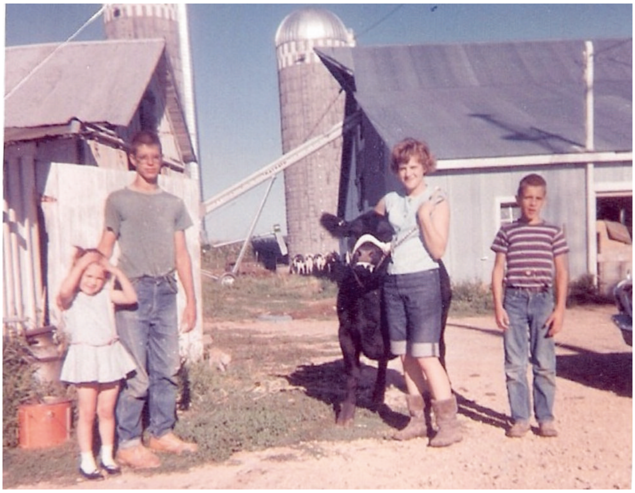
Eventually, my family moved and we had a working dairy farm. Farming is a hard life, but running even a small family dairy farm raises hard to a new level. Specifically, the work of dairy farming is dictated by the basic biology of cows, which in itself isn't complicated: For a cow to give milk it has to have a calf, which programs the cow to produce a lot of milk, although the programming lasts for less than a year. It then "dries up" or stops giving any milk for a couple of months. Once it has another calf, the cycle repeats.

Unless you work hard to time the pregnancies, you're always milking about 80 percent of the herd while the other 20 percent is dry, waiting to have a calf. This means you're milking 365 days a year, twice a day to keep its milk production up. In big operations, you may milk the cow three times a day.

It isn't that milking itself is so hard. We milked the cows in a barn with the cows stationary in stanchions. Today, large dairy operations often use robotics in milking parlors separate from "living quarters." On our farm, in warm weather the cows spent the evening in the pasture. It would take a while in the morning darkness to get the cows and herd them into the barn. It's curious, but each cow has its own personality and learns its assigned stanchions, where we'd also feed them a mixture of grains and supplements.

In the early days, we used milking machines that collected the milk locally in a bucket. That milk would have to then be carried to either milk cans or to a milk tank. Later, we had a pipeline system so the milk was carried through a glass pipe to the milk tank.

Dairy farming is labor-intensive, and no one on a farm is idle. That meant taking on jobs and responsibilities even as a small child. Between ages six and ten or so, my chore was to wash the cows' udders and teats for milking. I'd have a pail of water with an iodine disinfectant that stained my hands a sickly orange-yellow hue. Cows aren't as discriminating about where to lay down as they should be. Frequently, their udders would be smeared with dung. The fresh stuff wasn’t too bad to wash off, but when dried and caked on, it would take some work to wash off.



Cindy, Ray, Sue, Jim Smith. Sue is holding a steer that she will show at the Stephenson County Fair. We were living on this farm three miles north of Davis, Illinois.

Looking back, it’s no exaggeration to say that it was stressful to walk around the hind legs of what seemed like enormous beasts. Cows are normally pretty docile, although a few are nervous types and will kick at the slightest provocation. Any cow will kick if it’s scared enough. Although I quickly learned the ways of cows, every once in a while I got kicked. Most of these were mildly painful, but I once got kicked hard enough to launch me to the center of the barn. I landed on my elbow and didn’t regain all of the feeling in that spot. In fact, my elbow still has a small numb area.

One person can handle about three milking machines, and it takes about five minutes for the machine to milk a single cow. Doing the math, one person can milk about thirty-six cows in an hour. For years, we had fifty to sixty cows and two people milking, so the morning milking chore took about two hours (including all of the preparations before and cleaning up after) and was then repeated twelve hours later. Cows don't take days off for holidays, so we milked 365 days a year. Monotonous.

Obviously, given the demands of this kind of dairy operation, it was difficult to get away from milking. Each cow had its own needs. As the udder was nearly drained of milk, we'd place suction cups on one or more teats to focus on the parts of the udder not completely drained. We'd massage the udder and sometimes milk a bit by hand. If the udder wasn't drained completely, at a minimum, milk production was reduced, but worse, the cow developed mastitis. Mastitis is an inflammatory infection treated with antibiotics, which meant we couldn't use the milk. Mastitis is a serious problem, and one of our cows died from the infection.

ONE CHORE AFTER ANOTHER

Daily, rarely changing chores dominated my early life. Up at 5:00 a.m. for milking, back at the house at 7:00 a.m. for breakfast and getting ready to catch the bus to school, an hour bus ride away. By the time I got back at 4:30, it was about time for the evening chores, and then at 7:00 p.m. I was back in the house for dinner and bed. Homework wasn't a priority in those days because doing the chores was my main job, the most important thing of the day.

The Davis stone house is the first house I remember. There were twenty acres and a few outbuildings, a barn here, and maybe some milk cows. I have a foggy memory of the barn burning down. There was a pattern of barns and houses burning down, but no one proved that my father did it, so I can't say what happened.

While in Davis, we purchased our first major milking farm north of town. I remember getting up in the dark, piling into the truck with my brother and father for a twenty-minute drive to milk cows before and after school. We moved onto the farm when I was in fifth grade.

COLLECTING EGGS

Although we were primarily a dairy farm, we had a few other projects going. I recall being somewhere around four or five years old when I got to help Mom, something I liked to do. I had to climb over a big wooden gate to get to the building where we had the chicken coop, a faded and dilapidated grayish-brown wooden structure.

On one occasion, I opened the door and trudged across the straw and the chicken-poop-covered floor to the egg laying boxes. A particular smell lets you know chickens are nearby. I gathered up a few eggs and put them into what seemed a logical place to store them, my pants pockets. Working my way back to the house to show off my prizes to Mom, I had to scale the gate. By the time I was on the other side the eggs were a gooey mess in my pockets. *Next time, bring a basket.* I'd remember that.

BALING HAY

When I turned eight, Dad decided that I was old enough to drive the baler. We had a John Deere Model G tractor that pulled a hay baling machine which in turn pulled a wagon to collect the hay bales. I hated the job. If I steered the tractor one way, I'd drive over the row of cut hay, but too far the other way and the baler could miss some hay. Either way would lead to yelling, cursing, and maybe a couple of slaps around the ears from Dad.

This tractor had a hand clutch which took all of my eight-year-old strength to shove forward and engage the gears to go forward. My first time on the tractor, I got it lurching forward, but soon a gate was looming in front of me. I put both hands on the clutch and was pulling with all of my might to stop the steel beast before plowing through the gate. Unfortunately, the damn tractor crashed into the gate before Dad could run up and disengage the clutch. He adjusted the clutch so that I was able to engage and disengage it, but not before a drubbing.

NEVER A FREE MINUTE

Some people might say they never had a dull moment during childhood but given the nature of farm work, I can't say that. But I can rightly claim that I don't recall any free time. The farm work consumed our weekends. We never wanted for something that needed attention. In the spring, we plowed and planted, and then we baled hay in the summer and harvested in the fall. Winters were miserable, not only because the dairy cows needed the same attention as always, but because we had to keep them alive through bitter cold spells. It seemed we regularly had to deal with equipment that didn't work, and we were forever getting stuck in the snow. I especially hated winter.

No matter what, though, I didn't miss school. One day I was sick and stayed home from school but had to spend the day working on the farm with Dad. That taught me to drag myself to school no matter what.

A WELCOME CHANGE

I recall a particularly happy day. I learned that a Chicago development company wanted to buy our farm, and surrounding farms, to make Lake Summerset resort. So, the summer before my junior year of high school, Mom and Dad sold all of the cows and we moved to a nice house near Beloit, Wisconsin. At the time, I thought my milking days were over forever, but not quite.

Adversity introduces a man to himself.
– Albert Einstein

CHAPTER 2

EARLY MEMORIES: A LITTLE OF THIS, A LITTLE OF THAT

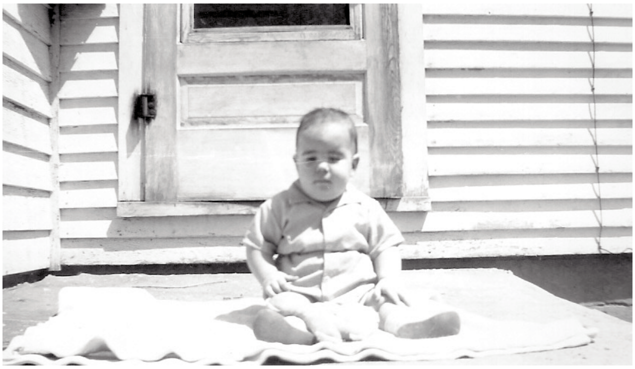
> Hard work spotlights the character of people: some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don't turn up at all.
>
> — Sam Ewing

My first memory of a Christmas tree stands out, perhaps because of the nature of the old Davis stone house. All of the rooms were large, and with ten-foot ceilings, it was cavernous, at least to me, a little kid of four or five. Life was austere, which could be why this memory stands out. The large tree sat in the bay window area of our living room and was covered with lights and decorations and topped with an old angel ornament. Packages were strewn around the bottom of it, but it seemed impossible that the tree could hold itself up. What kept it from falling down? It was standing, so I decided it must be safe.

Being curious and already something of an “experimenter,” I pulled on the lights to see what would happen, confident that all would be okay. Before I knew it, the tree came crashing to the floor. Oops! I couldn’t hide a Christmas tree the way I could hide dirty underwear. Naturally, Mom came to see what had happened, but surprisingly I got only a mild rebuke and the tree was sorted out.

WHERE DID THAT BLANKET GO?

Childhood memories are always selective, and sometimes fuzzy. Scientists tell us they may be a blending of a bunch of memory snippets that the mind pulls together to form an image. Maybe the researchers are right in a general sort of way, but I'd argue that the memory of carrying around a soft, ragged, light-blue blanket is as accurate as it is vivid. The blanket was with me whether I was walking around or curling up in a chair or sucking my thumb. It was always there to hold and rub against my skin.



Jim Smith sitting in front of the Stanley Knudsen house, the first house I lived in.

One day it disappeared. Mom said she didn't know what she did with it, but I think she stole it. Well, when you're eighteen, it's time to give up some things but I think I've always harbored a bit of a grudge.

A HUGE LIFE LESSON: NOT ALL EXPERIMENTS ARE GOOD

One day a neighbor kid and I caught a toad and somehow thought it would be a good idea to play catch with it. Soon that wasn’t enough and things escalated, and we used the toad as a ball to hit with our bat. That made a mess, but we thought it was pretty cool. When I went home, I told my parents about the cool new bat-a-toad game. Whoa! All hell broke out. I remember the yelling and some beating. Note to self: Don’t bat toads. I never did that again, but no matter how much time has passed, it’s one of many things I still feel bad about.

Ray, Jim, and Sue Smith in the driveway of our Davis home.

Along the same lines, when I was slightly older and probably in first or second grade, I got a BB gun and went around shooting everything. My friend Merle and I shot at each other. I didn't get hit often, but when I did, it hurt. Merle and I hunted pigeons in the barn, and when we killed a couple, his mom cooked them. Not much eating on a pigeon, I discovered. Then I thought it would be interesting to shoot at a robin, and I ended up killing the poor bird. I don't think I told anyone about that, probably because even then it didn't seem like a very good idea. It's another one of those events I feel bad thinking about.

TANGLING WITH BARBED WIRE

When I was around nine or ten and in fourth grade, I was in the truck with my brother Ray. When we drove past our neighbor Clifford's house, we saw a number of his cows out on the road. We stopped and started chasing them back into the field where they belonged. It was a summer day, and I was dressed as usual in blue jeans and a t-shirt. The grass was tall and dry, the color of amber. The grass created poor visibility as I was running around chasing those cows. Suddenly, I plowed into two strands of rusty barbed wire fence hidden in the grass. I was stuck fast with the barbed wire tangled in my shirt and skin.

I must have yelled for Ray because he came to me and carefully pulled me out of the fence. I had several little holes and scratches, plus one long deep gash, from my right nipple to my belly button. Looking into the wound, I could see meat and fat, but surprisingly little blood. Ray took me back home where Mom patched me up with some Band-Aids and whatever antiseptic we had, perhaps mercurochrome. (By the way, the old standby remedy of the era, mercurochrome, was removed from the "generally recognized as safe" category in 1998, partly because of its mercury content, but also because it wasn't an especially good antiseptic.) At the time, I was quite disappointed that even this injury didn't get me out of milking the cows that evening.

THE DYNAMITE EPISODE

Growing up on a farm, we had guns around for various purposes, and we learned how to handle them. From time to time, Dad dabbled with other stuff. Several farmers in the area would use dynamite to blow up tree stumps, for example. Dad, who had more than his share of harebrained ideas, decided to try to restart a dried-up spring with a big explosion. Dad, Ray, and I drove the old pickup truck out to the low spot in the field that used to bubble up water.

We dug a hole in the middle of the dry spring and then filled it with several sticks of dynamite and packed it with fertilizer. (Something similar was used in the Oklahoma bombing, although I think they used kerosene as well!) Once the hole was packed, we laid out and lit the fuse. Then we quickly backed up (fortunately) and hid behind the truck. The episode ended with a huge explosion and then a thick rain of rocks and dust. So, Dad's scheme resulted with a window busted out of the truck, but not a drop of water ever came out of the old well.

Another time, Dad had the idea to teach me how to make bombs. (I don't know why that would occur to him, other than he was fascinated with explosions.) In the driveway in the middle of the barn, he laid out all of the parts: sticks of dynamite, blasting caps, and fuses. The process wasn't complicated. Use something to poke a hole through the red waxy surface of the dynamite, and then insert a fuse into the blasting cap.

Simple enough, I thought, following the process and sliding the end of the fuse into the blasting cap to hold the two together. But the end of the cap is crimped down with a pair of pliers to the cap. I didn't grasp the importance of crimp placement, so as I started to mash down on the blasting cap with the pliers, Dad yelped and backed up and hit the deck. You see, if you hit the blasting cap wrong, it can explode in your hands. Besides taking fingers off, doing it in the middle of a pile of dynamite could set off a fatal explosion. Fortunately, I didn't set off the blasting cap. Normally, once the crimping is done, you place the cap in the hole in the dynamite, tape it in, and bundle it with as much dynamite as you need.

RUNNING AWAY FROM HOME

In fourth grade or so, around the same time I was chasing cows and getting caught in barbed wire, I dreamed about running away from home. At the time, a neighbor kid whose name I don't remember, lived just south of us. He was a kindred spirit, or seemed so, because he also wanted to run away. I don't recall any specific reason for running away, other than the overall miserableness of life on the farm.

This boy and I didn't have a plan about where to go or what to do when we got there. We were smart enough to know we needed money. No problem. We had a brilliant idea. I'd tell my parents that I was eating hot lunch at school, which meant getting the money from Mom to pay for it. Meanwhile, my friend would bring lunch from his house. Unfortunately, my friend was unreliable about bringing food for me, and it was hard to be inconspicuous in the cafeteria when I had no food on the table. The teacher on cafeteria duty would notice and then make sure the cafeteria gave me something to eat. This ruse went on for two or three days, but then my parents were notified and the jig was up. Like a lot of kids learn, running away from home sounds exciting until you try to figure out how to actually do it.

Meeting Sharon

When I was about ten or eleven, I met my half-sister Sharon. It happened when I was walking from the barn back towards the house. A good-looking woman with blonde hair approached me and told me that she was Sharon, my sister. Naturally, the hamsters were turning in my mind. How could I have a sister that I'd never seen or heard of before? Where had she been hiding?

Back row: Sue Smith, Vance Kistler, Sharon Smith Pieper, Ray Smith. Front row: Cindy Smith, Jim Smith, Todd Kistler. Taken at our farm north of Davis on the day I found out I had a half-sister Sharon. Note that there are almost no pictures of me smiling until I left home.

This was the first time I'd heard that my father had been married before. I still don't know the whole story. Dad married Reva, his high-school sweetheart, then skipped off to the Navy around the time Sharon was born. Oddly, Reva's family were close neighbors of ours in Davis. For years, we routinely walked by their house and had no idea our half-sister lived there.

Note that in the photo I don't look happy. It is hard to find a photo with me smiling before leaving home.

SOUND SLEEPER

It's no secret that my dad was a guy with many problems, and I have described them in more detail in an upcoming chapter. A couple of memories stand out, though, because they help explain my ability (as a kid) to sleep soundly anytime, anywhere. I could fall asleep on rough, scratchy bales of hay.

One morning when I was around twelve I came downstairs to get started on my chores. The living room was at the bottom of the stairs, and that morning, our big, heavy console TV was up against the north window with a large hole where the screen used to be. The living room was littered with chunks of glass of all sizes. The night before Dad was sitting in his easy chair watching a TV show, what we kids called a ”Cowboys and Indians” show. He had a gun and was also drunk, a combination sure to turn crazy. Apparently, he was pissed off that the Indians always lost, so he shot the TV screen. Obviously, that explosion made some noise, but not enough to rouse me out of my deep sleep.

Another time, I woke up in the morning to find bullet holes all over the ceiling above my bed. It seems Dad had been testing what I could sleep through.

Like most people, my memories more or less come and go in my consciousness, and some memories are more dramatic than others. But when it comes down to it, I come from a relatively big family, with degrees of problems that inevitably lead to a fair amount of drama.

Families are like fudge – mostly sweet with a few nuts.
– Unknown

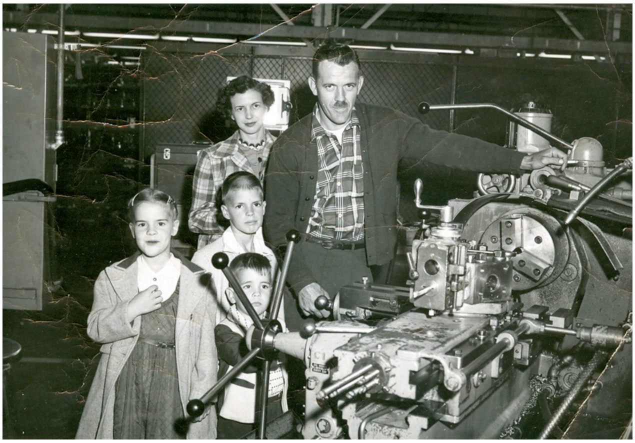
CHAPTER 3

WHO I AM AND WHERE I CAME FROM

> You don't choose your family. They are God's gift to you, as you are to them.
>
> — Desmond Tutu

> You know, the funny thing about relationships is that they're all different.
>
> — Jerry Seinfeld

My dad died relatively young, an event that didn't particularly sadden me. I've come to realize that bitterness and anger aren't beneficial, and forgiveness is good, but at the same time, facts are facts.



Sue, Ray, Jim, Carolyn, and Frank Smith. Take your family to work day at Sundstrand in Rockford, Illinois.

Dad, Frank Everette Smith, was born April 26, 1919, in Durand, Illinois, and died the day after his sixtieth birthday in the bathtub of Mom's house. We didn't have a good relationship, and elsewhere I recount some reasons why news of his death wasn't painful for me. In fact, when Ray called to deliver the news that Dad died, I thought: *What a relief, good riddance*.

I'd been bitter and angry with him for so many years. But in the years after his death, I came to forgive him, in large part because of the work of motivational speaker, Brian Tracy. In one of Tracy's talks, he emphasized the need to change negative, even toxic mindsets, in order to achieve the goals we have the power to set for ourselves. I also talked with psychologists and read books about a recovery group self-labeled, Adult Children of Alcoholics (ACOA). (There's a book by the same name.) I also read Claudia Black's book, *It Will Never Happen to Me!* Black's work is specifically targeted to those who grow up with alcoholism in the family. Addiction (or other mental health concerns) wasn't part of casual conversation and it didn't show up in public policy debates about health care or even impaired driving–that all came into our political life much later.

I didn't limit myself to material about addiction. Brian Tracy's work helped me in many ways, as did Victor Frankl's classic, *Man's Search for Meaning*, and other similar books. Frankl's book is one read widely by those in my generation, who were on a quest to live fully. Likewise, my generation eventually delved deeply into information about addiction and dysfunctional families and relationships, which is why they're not as hidden or hushed up as they once were.

Eventually, I concluded that the sooner we accept that the vast majority of parents do the best they can with the inner and outer resources they have at the time, the sooner we can let go of bitterness and resentment and get on with our lives. Ultimately, I learned that harboring anger against anyone only hurts us.

Dad grew up in and around Durand, and farming was a big part of his upbringing. From what I gathered, he always seemed to be a handful for his mom. At age 16, Dad lost his father, but alcohol had become part of his life early–he wasn't yet 13 when he got drunk on wine. Dad married his high school sweetheart, had a daughter, Sharon, and left for the Navy soon after.

We heard a lot of stories about Dad drinking and fighting while in the Navy. One rumor was that he'd actually killed someone in a fight. Dad was a big guy, almost six feet tall and close to two hundred pounds. He had a stocky frame and a block of a head. I remember his big hands–maybe that was part of what made him a good athlete, a decent swimmer. I also remember seeing him playing softball with some other men.

Dad's mother, my Grandma Hazel, worked for the state of Illinois in Springfield, which is where my Mom worked. Through that connection he met and married Mom.

Gramma Hazel Smith. She was a classic grandmother who worked and lived in Springfield Illinois. I looked forward to her visits, and presents.

Like other alcoholics, Dad would have periods of sobriety followed by periods of drinking. Ironically, several people I've come across credit him with getting them to stop drinking, Uncle Tweety (Aunt Grace's husband) for one, and a man named Harvey Ostergaard, for another.

Dad didn't do anything to take care of his body. (He was fairly typical of people in his time.) He smoked up to two packs a day, and occasionally abused prescription drugs, marijuana, or whatever drug he could find. He ate a Midwestern diet, heavy on unhealthy fat and carbs, and did little in the way of cardio exercise. By the time he was fifty, he'd lost most of his teeth. He died from the heart disease that started in his fifties.

Drunk or sober he had a violent disposition. I learned not to stand too close to him, because at any moment he could get pissed off and hit me--or whoever was close by. At one point I traded a bunny for a knife to sleep with, but even so, the worst of it was verbal abuse. Some of his favorite phrases were "shit for brains," "you don't have the sense to pour the piss out of your boots," or, "you'd lose your head if it wasn't screwed on." He called us stupid and worthless. Later in life I realized that I was still driven to prove to my now dead father that I wasn't worthless.

Dad taught me two memorable lessons. One morning after I'd come home very late and very drunk (we could do anything we wanted, just be there for milking the cows), and he said, "It is up to you if you want to drink but you can see it hasn't done me any good."

I was still in high school and I didn't give up my excessive drinking then (more on that later), but the words stuck with me and as an adult I've been careful about my own drinking.

Another time Dad taught me about the risks of stealing. We had a guy stay with us for a couple of years, Keith Chapman. (More about him later, too.) Chappy was older and could drive and we'd head into nearby Freeport to steal tools at Kmart. Chappy loved tools. I had no use for them, but there was a thrill in stealing and not getting caught. When Dad saw the tools he said, "Stealing is a thrill, but eventually you'll get caught and it isn't worth it." Somehow, his words resonated with me and fortunately I gave up stealing.

AND THEN, MOM

Mom was born in 1921, in Eagle Point, a town in north central Illinois. As far as I can tell it's no bigger than a spot on the road. She was the oldest of three girls, and also had an older brother who died at 18 months. She was short, a little over five feet tall, with brown hair and eyes, and a slight frame. She was quite pretty as a young woman.

Mom's family was very poor, but after high school she got a job in state government in Springfield, she was very proud of her speed and accuracy of typing. She worked with Dad's mom and his sister, Jean. At some point Mom met my dad through his mom and sister, and when I became an adult, I wondered why they didn't warn her about my dad and what she was getting into.

I think of Mom as a bit of a wallflower, overshadowed by Dad. She took care of the household while I was mostly outside and had no inside chores. I left my clothes on the floor and the bed unmade. She washed the clothes and my bed would be made sometime during the day.

Her cooking was more or less straightforward fare, meat and potatoes. I was amazed that she could always come up with a meal plan and nothing went to waste. What little was left over from one meal would find its way into the next. In one meal the central feature could be mush, boiled corn meal, which I didn't much care for. The next meal however would be fried mush, which I did like after I'd liberally covered it with syrup.

Mom was totally unselfish. If there was a last piece of toast, she'd never seemed to mind letting one of us kids have it. I wondered if that was something that comes with being an adult, but now I've concluded that it depends on the adult.

Mom kept a large garden which kept us supplied with potatoes and vegetables. There was plenty left at the end of the season, which she preserved through canning. She took food safety seriously, so the vegetables, and the jars and lids were all boiled. The hot vegetables quickly went into the jars and the lids were applied and screwed down tight. As the jar cooled the lid would get sucked down. If you found a jar later with the lid popped up, you knew the contents were bad, and we threw it away. The jar was reused of course. Little went to waste. In rural parts of the country, many people today still can produce from their gardens and also the fruit they either grow themselves or buy in bulk. But once I left home, not many people I knew took up canning as a way to preserve food.

My mother put up with a tremendous amount of abuse from my father: black eyes, broken bones, and humiliation. At that time, it was common for women to take this abuse, perhaps cover up their bruises, and try to hide what was going on from other people, including family. Mom, like many other women of that time, was isolated and wouldn't have known where to go for help, let alone figure out a way to provide for her children.

It wasn't until I was around fifteen years old that she started to leave the house after a particularly dangerous encounter. By then my older siblings were out of the house and it was just me and my nine-year-old sister Cindy. One time we escaped to some friends of Mom's in Freeport, about ten miles from where we lived. Dad showed up with tools to break into the house, along with a gun. Fortunately, he was arrested and charged with attempted murder. (Still, it was humiliating that something like this could happen in the family.)

It was years later when she finally divorced Dad and moved to Freeport. She worked for an insurance company typing up forms, dusting off her skills from her early years in Springfield.

She was living in Freeport in a duplex on Empire Street when I was at the University of Wisconsin Madison. Around the time I moved to San Diego, she let Dad move back in with her. I wasn't there, but my siblings said that they had a nice birthday party for Dad on his sixtieth birthday, April 26, 1979. He was found dead from a heart attack the next day in Mom's bathtub. I remember getting the call from my brother Ray in my house in Escondido, California. As I mentioned earlier, I didn't feel sad about it and made no pretense about it. I told Ray that I wouldn't be returning for Dad's funeral, and I didn't change my mind.

Around 2000, Mom moved from Empire Street to the Knollwood Estates mobile home park because she thought her neighborhood had deteriorated too much. That's a tricky issue when I think about it. Although she wouldn't consider herself a racist, and she was nice to everyone, I think there was some racism in her thinking. That was just the way it was for a majority of white Americans. She lived happily in the mobile home park until she moved to an assisted living facility, Heritage Woods.

Mom had smoked until she retired at around age sixty. She had been diagnosed with congestive heart failure and emphysema at least twenty years before she died of complications from the flu. By then she'd moved into Heritage Woods, in Freeport for her last four years. She was quite happy there and proud of her room, which she'd decorated to suit her tastes. She took advantage of many of the activities, like playing cards, exercise classes, and getting her hair done.

Mom and I share a particular "quirk," called misophonia, which is a dislike of certain sounds. At Heritage Woods, Mom was placed at a dinner table with a woman that would get a glass full of ice and proceed to chew through it during meals. Chewing ice is more painful to me than the sound of chalk squeaking on a chalkboard. I would have had a challenge sitting through a meal, but she put up with it for two years. She asked the woman to stop but when she refused, Mom finally asked to sit at another table. She did, but that caused an uproar as the ice chewer was insulted. It goes to show us that you're never too old for petty problems.

Mom stayed at Heritage Woods until February 2017. My sister Sue told me that Mom had been taken to the hospital with a bad case of the flu. Apparently they didn't admit her but kept her under observation. For the next two days I thought they were going to release her, but then on February 8, 2017, I got the call that Mom passed away. Between the flu, pneumonia, and weakened heart and lungs, it was too much.

GRAMMA AND GRAMPA PORTS

Mom's mother, Inez Garman was born in 1895 in Brookville, Illinois, and died in 1981 in Dixon, Illinois. Her father, Otho Ports, also born in Eagle Point, in 1897, died in 1987 in Polo, Illinois. Both were descendants of German immigrants. Otho was a farmer and Inez taught school, and both had long lives and died of stroke or heart disease.

One summer when I was around ten years old, I stayed with these grandparents for several days. They lived in a big old white house in Hazelhurst, Illinois. Hazelhurst had a dozen houses, a feed mill, and maybe a small store. The house itself had electricity and cold water. The bathroom was an outhouse about twenty yards from the back door. (At night, we used chamber pots and carefully emptied them in the morning.) The house sat on about twenty acres and included a barn and some sheds.

Great-grandmother Jane Rubendahl Garman is seated second to the left. She's the only great-grandparent I ever met. My Gramma Inez Ports is seated to the far right.

Baths were infrequent at my grandparents' house, maybe once a week. Water was heated up on a big black wood cookstove in the kitchen and poured into a large, galvanized metal tub in a back room next to the kitchen.

Grampa had a drinking problem, but he tried to hide it from Gramma. I followed him around his little farm one day and saw empty whiskey bottles all over the place in one of the sheds. He'd secretly have walnut trees cut down on his property to get cash to buy more whiskey.

Grandpa Otho Ports. He was a farmer that lived in tiny town of Hazelhurst, Illinois.

GRAMMA AND GRANDPA SMITH

I never met Dad's father, Grandpa Ray Smith, who died of cancer when Dad was almost seventeen years old. During genealogy research I learned that Grandpa Ray Smith died in Chicago at the Cook County Hospital. The Smiths were mostly likely of English descent, and I've traced the line to a Clark Smith born in the late 1700s.

Grandpa Ray Smith. He was a cook in the Army at the end of World War 1, stationed in Normandy, France.

Grandpa Ray was a cook in the Normandy region during World War I. I learned this from letters Grandma Hazel and my Aunt Meta wrote to each other and which my cousin Doug Curtis sent to me. Hazel followed Ray to San Francisco where he did basic training. They also were married there. Later when Ray was in France, Hazel petitioned the Army to have him released early. She was pregnant with my father and not feeling well. The Army internal documentation said that many soldiers were in similar situations and denied her request. Grandpa Ray returned home not long after that, anyway.

Gramma Hazel was Hazel Becker, born in 1896 in Durand, Illinois, and died after a stroke in 1980 in Jefferson, Kentucky, near Louisville.

I enjoyed Grandma Hazel's visits, infrequent though they were. She lived in Springfield until she became ill and moved to Louisville, which was more than a four-hour drive. She was a large woman, not heavy, but she had a big frame--and lots of gray hair. She dressed nicely and always had a smile on her large, oblong face. She'd arrive with a big suitcase and we kids would rush to her bed where she'd open the suitcase and distribute presents to us. It also seemed to me that Dad was on better behavior while she was around.

Not forgiving is like drinking rat poison and then waiting for the rat to die.
— Anne Lamott

CHAPTER 4
MY SIBLINGS

> Our siblings push buttons that cast us in roles we felt sure we had let go of long ago—the baby, the peacekeeper, the caretaker, the avoider. It doesn't seem to matter how much time has elapsed or how far we've traveled.
>
> — Jane Mersky Leder

I think of Ray as the eldest, but as mentioned earlier, that honor actually goes to Sharon, who is ten years older than my 'oldest sister' Sue, who is ten years older than my youngest sister Cindy, who happens to be ten years older than my wife, Jane Lea. I mention this, because when Jane Lea turned forty, the women had what they called a decades birthday party, turning forty, fifty, sixty, and seventy years old.

Sister (half-sister?) Sharon Louise Smith Daly

Of all my siblings I've spent the least amount of time with Sharon. I was about ten years old when I met her and we never lived close to each other. Ray and Sue found out about Dad's previous marriage and Sharon at the same time I did.

As I write this, she's living in an assisted living facility, Quail Ridge, in Pocatello, Idaho, near one of her sons. She seems to be very happy there but repeats that fact so often that I fear for her memory.

While I was living in Davis, Illinois, I walked by her house on the way to catch the school bus but at the time didn't know she existed. I assume Sharon knew about us, but I wonder what she thought. Was she told to stay away? I don't know the answers to those questions, but I don't believe she had an easy time growing up.

In 1957, Sharon graduated from Winnebago High School, and then attended Eastern University in Charleston, Illinois, for two years. She worked as a waitress in a country club, where she met a family that moved to San Diego. Sharon went with them and eventually graduated from San Diego State University. She met Dean Kistler in San Diego and had two children, Todd and Vance. When they were divorced, Dean fled to Mexico to avoid child support. What a guy!

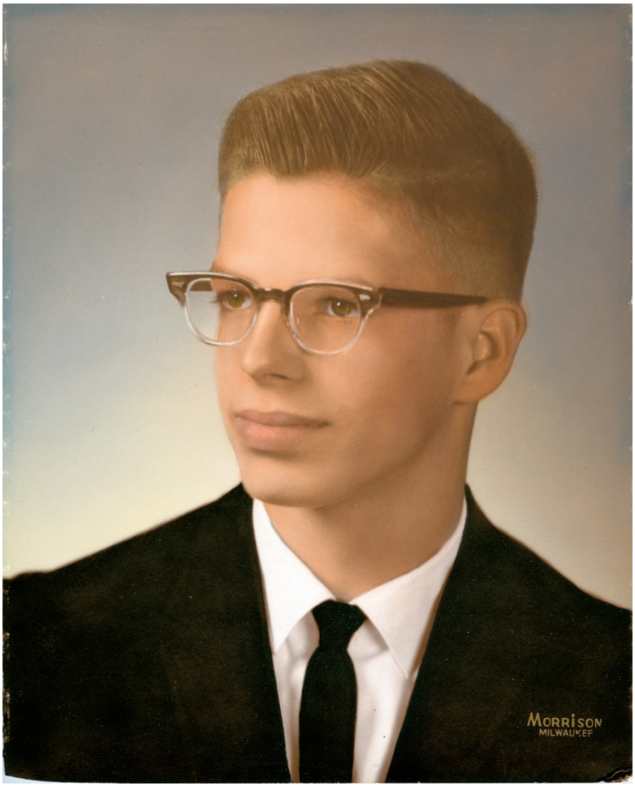
By 1965 Sharon had moved back to Illinois, where she met George Daly. They were married in California in 1969 and had two children, Kevin and Curtis. My brother Ray has said Sharon was married five times, but I have just two additional guys in my notes, Monty Thompson and Ken Drake.

Sharon was a special education teacher for most of her career, and for the majority of that time she lived in northern California near her mother, Reva, who was in Santa Rosa, California. She married her third husband, Monty Thompson in California in 1979.

By 2000, she had converted to Mormonism and moved to Midway, Utah. Mormons are very interested in genealogy, because they can baptize the dearly departed, so Sharon and I shared an interest in discovering our ancestors.

MY BIG BROTHER RAY

I thought my brother Ray was the smartest member of our family. When I took algebra and had trouble with tricky word problems, I went to Ray for help and he could always help me sort them out. Sadly, our father beat the inquisitiveness out of him.



Brother Ray Smith

There's a story about Ray that I can't get out of my mind. It took place one summer day when he was crimping hay. The hay we fed our cows was alfalfa, and after the hay was cut we'd crimp it. Crimping involves taking the cut hay on the ground and running it through two interlaced cylinders, to smash, or "crimp" the alfalfa. Crimping allowed the hay to dry faster and was more palatable for the cows.

However, the actual process of crimping doesn't always go smoothly. The hay often is wrapped tightly around the crimping cylinders, and as a result, the crimping machine and tractor stall. The driver has to stop and get off the tractor, go back to the crimper and cut the plug of hay using a curved knife. Once back on the tractor the driver applies power through the tractor's clutch to the crimper, hoping that enough hay had been cut so that the cylinders would spin freely again. Like a car with manual transmission, starting again involved some slipping of the clutch. (Whew, more information than you ever wanted to know about one piece of the hay baling process!)

On that particular day, Ray was crimping hay in a field near our house. I was in the house and could hear Dad mumbling that Ray was slipping the clutch too much. He was pacing back and forth, swearing and hurling insults into the air. "Shit for brains," or "doesn't have the sense to pour the piss out of his boots," and other choice phrases Dad frequently used to describe his kids.

When the swearing and the pacing weren't enough, Dad would march out to the field to beat Ray for a while. Seriously. My stomach would churn–I was physically ill from worrying about Ray. In the hopes that it would take his mind off of beating Ray, I told Dad I was very sick. But to no avail. For me, helplessly witnessing someone beat and degrade another person seems about as psychologically damaging as getting beaten myself. Obviously, I've never forgotten it, and it's only one of the bad incidents I witnessed that involved Ray.

Ray was a good student in high school, and also participated in basketball in his sophomore year. The day that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated (11-22-1963), basketball practice wasn't canceled, and Ray stayed for practice. Dad was furious that practice wasn't canceled. He expected Ray to come home. At the time, most schools canceled all their outside events, because the assassination was a huge and shocking tragedy that affected the whole country.

This reminds me about what Ray has said about my parents' political leanings. Mom was a Republican, although she may have switched later in life. Dad was a Democrat. They said that they canceled out each other's votes. During the 1960 Kennedy-Nixon debate, Dad got so mad at something Nixon said that he picked up a baseball bat with the intent of bashing the TV set. Fortunately, our Aunt Grace was there and was able to get him to stop.

As an aside, Dad was a member of the National Farmers Organization (NFO). In 1967, as a protest over the low prices farmers got for their milk, we and other NFO members dumped all of our milk down the drain. The collective action caused a drop in milk supplies in the US and led to a court injunction.

Ray ran the two-mile on the track team. As it happened, both of us were better at endurance than speed. Unfortunately, my siblings and I all abused alcohol in high school, and we were lucky we didn't die in a car crash while driving drunk. For some reason, after high school, all of us were able to moderate our drinking, and none of us smoked. We took that good lesson from watching our father–and like I said, it was one of the ways we were lucky.

In 1966, Ray graduated from Dakota High School and stayed at home the following year and continued to milk cows, while also attending Highland Community College in Freeport. During this time, he also was drinking and staying out late partying with his high school friend, Steve. Although Ray started his sophomore year at Highland, he wasn't motivated to continue studying and dropped out.

Around this time Dad sold the dairy herd. Thank god! Ray hauled milk for the local cheese factory for a month. A truck held 10-gallon milk cans, which weighed almost ninety pounds each. It was a grueling job. Fortunately, they also had a bulk milk tank, which pumped refrigerated milk out of the farmer's tank into the truck. That was more like it.

Ray applied to work for Sundstrand, at the time a company that manufactured farming machinery, located in Rockford, Illinois. He may have applied because Dad had worked there in the 1950s. Ray would have been hired but for the hernia that was discovered during the required physical. Ray, also like Dad, applied and got a job as a machinist apprentice at Fairbanks Morse, a company that manufactured pumps, marine engines, and other industrial equipment, in Beloit, Wisconsin. He worked in the tool and die department from 1967 to 1970. The company encouraged him to take classes at Beloit Technical College, and he also moved out of the house during these years. First, he stayed at our Aunt Grace and Uncle Tweetie's house in Rockford, and then for a while, he stayed at the Rockford YMCA, which at that time rented rooms to single men. Later he shared an apartment with his Fairbanks Morse coworkers, Bob Richardson and Roger Cadotte.

Much to our dismay, in 1969, Dad bought a farm south of Orfordville, which was run by workers Dad hired, at least for the first year. Dad didn't like how anyone else managed the farm, and somehow he managed to talk Ray into coming back to milk cows and farm. Then, in 1970, Ray had his first date with his future wife, Susan Dehaven, who he took to the Stephenson County Fair in Freeport, Illinois. They were married on May 15th, 1971.

As you can imagine, Ray found farming with Dad extremely stressful. Ray wasn't confident in knowing how to run a farm, which makes sense. It's bound to be hard to ask questions to someone who has consistently belittled or physically abused you for your entire life.

Dad also picked up stray characters to work on the farm. One of our favorites was Sandy McDonald, an accomplished craftsman, but an alcoholic who Dad found living under a bridge. Sandy designed a huge new shed and an automated feed distribution system for the cows. Under Sandy's supervision, Ray helped to build this system. Later Sandy got sober and went on to be an alcoholism counselor.

Dad had a way of helping other alcoholics but was never able to help himself as much.

The house on the farm was an old painted wood two-story box of a place, cold and drafty. And mice ran free everywhere. I set out a handful of traps and many times a day I could hear the snap of a mouse being crushed in a trap. Previous residents had thrown the trash away just yards from the front door, which now stood about four feet high, six feet wide, and ten feet long. What a mess! We carted it all away, wagon load by wagon load, and dumped it into a ravine in the woods about a mile away from our house. At that time, when it came to handling trash, you either burned it or found somewhere to dump it.

By the beginning of 1973, Ray'd had enough of the severe stress of farming with Dad and told him he was leaving the farm. Dad was furious and wouldn't talk to Ray for days. Eventually, though, in April of that year, he agreed to sell the farm. Ray was quite emotional about the whole process. He was depressed about giving up on the family farm but overwhelmed with relief that he no longer had to deal with either Dad or the farm.

Ray's father-in-law, Jerry, worked for a company that at the time made metal cast cabinet fixtures, located in Rockford. Ray applied and was hired, but since the hernia was still an issue, Ray went ahead with the surgery. Post-surgery, he was not supposed to do physical work for a few weeks, but he also needed the money. He talked to the managers at Amerock and they couldn't have been better. They let him come to work and gave him the lightest duty possible. Ray set up and repaired the huge casting machines, which typically called for a lot of heavy lifting. For those first weeks, though, if anything needed to be lifted, someone came and did it for him. I'm not sure how many companies would be so kind. The starting pay was paltry by today's standard, $3.75 an hour, but to put it in perspective, at the time, minimum wage in Illinois was $1.40.

Ray worked hard and stayed with Amerock until the company shipped its manufacturing to Mexico and closed in 2005, a result of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) that came into effect in 1994. A lot of manufacturing moved to Mexico to take advantage of the lower wage scale.

Next he applied to the pharmaceutical packing company, Anderson Packaging, also located in Rockford. Because he had friends there, he'd likely have landed the job, but nepotism appeared to be at work on the part of the hiring manager. As a result, Ray wasn't hired, but he found a job with Sub Zero, a manufacturer of luxury kitchen appliances, near Madison, Wisconsin. He liked the work but it was a long drive.

A year later, Anderson Packaging called Ray and asked him to work for them. They offered a large wage increase to $23 an hour and off he went. All kinds of pharmaceuticals arrived in bulk and machines would put them into pill bottles, blister packs, or whatever was needed. Ray set up, maintained, and repaired the machines. He'd never been happier at a job and worked there until retirement in 2019.

Throughout this time, he and Susan raised three great kids, Jennifer, Jeff, and Jill. He's a staunch supporter of the local Dakota High School sports teams, especially wrestling and football. He's also an active member of the local Methodist Church.

Ray says that after farming, every job was easier, and none was too dirty. Given what he endured with Dad, no boss was too bad and he got along with all of them. For what he went through growing up, at first life seemed hopeless, a good life impossible. So, Ray never dreamed that his life would be so good. Now, he's loved and accepted. Life has turned out great.

MY SISTER SUE

Sue, (not to be confused with my sister-in-law Susan) born on November 10, 1949, has always been a vibrant and lively person. Standing a little over five feet tall, Sue is cute and gregarious, with a personality bigger than her size. Sue was the opposite of Ray, who was fairly quiet. She was almost always positive and enthusiastic, with plenty to say about everything.

Morrison
Milwaukee

Sister Suzanne Marie Smith Busjahn

Growing up, Sue was part of our family team, working alongside Ray and me to get the chores done. Ray and I did more of the milking, leaving Sue to do everything else, like taking care of the calves and chickens. Before we had the more efficient milk pipeline, she carried the milk from the machine to the milk house. As was even more common then than now, Sue ended up doing more general cleanup work and house cleaning than the boys did.

We baled hay during the summer, and Sue drove the bailer until I turned eight and took over the job. I hated it, just as she had. If she made a mistake, something like not driving straight enough down the row, Dad would jump off the trailing hay wagon and run up to her and beat her for some unpredictable period of time. Then he'd dash back to the hay wagon. Needless to say, this wasn't a fun job.

Being in our household was challenging for Sue in unique ways. In her junior year of high school, she had a date for prom, and Ray and I had agreed to take over her chores so she had time to get ready. Sue had done her hair and put on her prom dress, but at some point, and for some unknown reason, our drunken father ordered her to go back to the barn to do her chores. By the time she was done her date was waiting. Then, even worse, by the time she was ready to go, Dad had flattened one of the tires of her date's car, causing further delay. It was a cruel episode she'd never forget.

My siblings and I have "reminisced" about the challenges of growing up in our household. Sue wishes our Mom could have protected us more, but she also understands that in that era, not everyone considered it a terrible thing for a husband to beat his wife. Without question, my mom was Mrs. Frank Smith, and no one thought of calling her Carolyn Ports Smith. At least where we lived, there was little to no support for battered women.

Unfortunately, Mom was also critical of Sue. The boys could do no wrong, and our little sister Cindy was the "baby" of the family, so Mom's frustrations were taken out on Sue. I was fortunate to have our threesome, Ray, Sue, and me. Sure, we were kids, and Ray would rough up Sue, who in turn, beat me up. For the most part, though, we looked out for each other as best we could.

Sue left home as soon as she could. She worked entry level clerical jobs at several companies like the insurance firm, Crum & Forster, and Burgess Battery, where she also learned about batteries and blueprints. She worked a punch press at the electrical switch manufacturing company Micro Switch, and helped take care of older people who were patients at the Medina Nursing home in Durand, Illinois.

When she was working at Medina, one of her tasks was to ask the residents if they had had a BM, meaning bowel movement. At some point she asked an elderly lady, “Have you had a BM today?” To which the lady replied, “As a matter of fact, I have. Thanks for asking. But I’m not a resident here.” Sue loved to tell that story and has a great sense of humor.

When she started working as a bookkeeper at the feed mill in Davis, Illinois, Sue discovered she not only enjoyed working with numbers, but she was also good at it. She stayed in that job until the mill had financial problems and closed down. From there she went to work for the Rock City Bank, where she continued doing bookkeeping and also worked as a teller. There was a downside to that job, though. The manager left ashtrays and matches, to accommodate customers who smoked, and Sue hated smoking. She complained to the manager, but he refused to change.

At the time, one of the bank’s customers was the Afolkey Cheese Factory, and as a favor to Afolkey, the bank had Sue do their books. That led to a job at Afolkey, later part of Berner Foods, to work as their bookkeeper full time. It was a smoke-free plant, and she made more money.

Sue stayed at Berner Foods for years but became dissatisfied that the men would ask for and get raises but they wouldn’t do the same for her. Not an uncommon story in those days. Eventually, Sue told her boss her intention to look for another job if she didn't get a raise. The boss didn't listen, and Sue left. Her situation was not rare then, and still affects women today. In 2024, one estimate held that women earned 16 percent less than men did for the same job.

Kelly Springfield was a large tire manufacturer, near Freeport, Illinois, and not far from Sue's home. As much as she liked bookkeeping, she was hired to make tires. She was tough, but building tires was as physically challenging as anything that she'd ever done. The company appreciated her hard work and dedication and eventually made her a supervisor. But times changed; they made fewer tires and she was laid off because she had less seniority than many other employees.

Sue ended up back at Berner Foods, now as an inventory specialist, and she was great at it. The factory had problems keeping track of materials, which led to waste and quality problems, and Sue got them back on track.

Sue married her husband Dave Busjahn on December 23, 1972, and they had two children. By the time she was in her sixties, however, Dave had health issues and Sue wanted to work less. She proposed the idea that she'd work 16 hours a week, which her supervisor thought was a fine plan. Her boss disagreed with those terms and said she had to work at least twenty hours a week or quit. So, she quit.

Sue always loved taking care of her four grandkids when they were little. Now she spends a lot of time watching them in their sports pursuits–baseball, football, and every other kind of ball game. Active in her church, Sue volunteers every year to organize their pie fundraiser. She makes pies herself and oversees the baking of hundreds of pies.

MY YOUNGER SISTER, CINDY

Cindy was born July 12th, 1959. I was six years old, and although I don't remember Mom being pregnant, I have a vague, confused memory of Cindy coming home from the hospital.

Sister Cynthia Lorraine Smith Vraszity

Because she was so much younger, I don't have a lot of memories of her, which I wish was not the case. However, I have the sense that Cindy was off on her own with even less protection than what I had. Not a good thing in our chaotic and even volatile household. I left home at age 18, and then spent much of the next few years in the army and stationed overseas, which meant I saw very little of Cindy. I not only don't have as many memories, but I also didn't spend as much time with her as I did with my other siblings.

Cindy went to Dakota elementary school until we moved to Beloit before she entered fifth grade, and the following year she went to Orfordville Parkview for sixth grade. In 1977, she graduated from Orangeville High School.

Cindy married twice and had four children and seven grandchildren. Her first husband, Jeff Lizer, was a star wrestler at Dakota high school, but that didn't translate into being a great husband. A few tumultuous years later, and after the birth of two children, Stephanie and Joshua, they divorced. Not long after that, Jeff was fired from his job for embezzlement. In the 1990s Cindy worked in the same factory as our brother Ray, Amerock, where she met her current husband Ken Vrazsity. They had two children Jordan and Katlyn. In the 2000s, she left that job and went to work for one of the large Woodman's grocery stores

In 2010, Cindy's oldest daughter, Stephanie, died, and around that time Cindy stopped working to take care of Stephanie's young children, Olivia and Matthew. Stephanie had been doing well as an LPN (Licensed Practical Nurse). Her job involved traveling to patients' homes delivering care and medications. Unfortunately, she started taking some of the patients' medications and died of a drug overdose.

Cindy currently lives in Dakota, Illinois, with her husband Ken, her son Jordan, and grandkids Olivia and Matthew. She's a member of the local Methodist church and helps out a lot with her daughter Katlyn's three children. I believe Cindy's life was even more challenging than the crummy life that we had as children, but now she's doing pretty well.

In summary, my siblings have done well considering our start. None are addicts, alcoholics, or smokers. Sharon and I went to college and made our way to California while Ray, Sue, and Cindy stayed close to our original homestead. All are productive members of society and satisfied with life for the most part. I think the cycle has been broken.

Siblings: children of the same parents, each of whom is perfectly normal until they get together.
— Sam Levenson

CHAPTER 5

EARLY CURIOSITY PAYS OFF

> Life is trying things to see if they work.
>
> — Ray Bradbury

Starting out in the army in the electronics field was a fortunate break in a life that until then hadn't seen much in the way of opportunity. However, I later realized that in part because of the farming and other conditions around me, I had outlets for my curiosity. Not that all of these opportunities were necessarily safe, but they still taught me a lot and in some ways set me on a career path. My curiosity about how things worked and in the world around me started in that old Davis stone house. A guy named Jeremiah Davis had built it. He'd made his fortune in the California gold rush of the 1860s.

The house was an amazing place for a five-year-old to explore, starting with a root cellar with a typical dirt floor. It was always damp and dark and cool, even in the summer heat. We used it for its intended purpose, a place to store vegetables like potatoes and turnips. A regular basement sat above the root cellar in the two-story house, plus an attic and a small, dark room above the attic.

I have some good memories of being happy to play and explore the big house by myself. Even as a small child I much preferred to be alone rather than dragged along on any of my father's misadventures. Alone, I spent a long time taking things apart, which, like most kids, I was good at. Putting them back together was a different story. I have a vivid recollection of a plastic toy robot that made a grinding sound as its arms and legs moved back and forth while its eyes flashed. I went on a quest to discover how it worked, but sadly, I reduced it to parts in the process. I never did find out how it did these amazing things.

On one occasion I went out with my father in our old beat-up Chevy pickup truck in order to sell metal scrap at a scrap yard. I was fascinated by the crane and electromagnet that would swing over the heaps of metal and deposit it in the scrap heap. I resolved to make my own. Somehow, I knew that an electromagnet needed electricity and wire wrapped around something metal. I went down to the basement and found a chunk of wood and drove in a few nails. Then I found some bare solid wire, which I wrapped and looped around one nail after the other. When I'd looped all the wire that I could and was left with two bare ends, I shoved these ends into a handy electrical outlet. Wow! I hadn't expected such an explosion of sparks—or burned fingers. My experiment also knocked out power in a significant section of the house. I hid my gadget and as I recall, I kept my genius work my secret. It's plain to see, though, I was destined to be an electrical engineer.

OOPS! SAVE THE CAT

Magnets were one thing, but cats and chickens truly amazed me. My mother took care of a lot of chickens in one of the outbuildings behind our house. Once a year we'd "harvest" our chickens. First their heads would be chopped off. (Yes, it's true; a chicken can run without a head. It's a sight to see.) Next we'd pluck them. We had a big pot of boiling water going and that's where we dropped the feathered carcasses, but not for long. We didn't want to cook them. We pulled them out of the water at the point their feathers came out pretty easily.

So, a curious five-year-old asks: Does this only apply to feathers? What about fur? My sister had a cat, Fluffy, so I had what I needed for another experiment. I picked up Fluffy and proceeded to the bubbling pot, but the cat sensed this was a bad idea, and when I raised her in the air, she scratched my arms all to hell and escaped to safety. In the ways of parental justice, my dad got ahold of me and spanked the crap out of me. So, I still don't know if you can pluck a cat but I do know some experiments are best left to the professionals. Or, at least curious kids need to be more discreet.

At a slightly older age I wondered how it was that cats always land on their feet. I'd hold a cat in various positions before dropping it, always impressed that they landed upright. I eventually worked up to dropping cats off the balcony on the patio behind our house. They still stuck the landing, but self-preservation won out, and the cats started giving me a wide berth. I probably should have stuck to the less dangerous experiments with old robot toys, anyway. Years later, when I chose my specialty in the army, the general field of electronics was the closest I could come to becoming the mad scientist of my imagination.

SUPERHERO OR MAD SCIENTIST

Looking back, I'm not surprised that I was drawn to superhero comic books, especially Thor, X-Men, Ironman, Daredevil, Batman, and Superman. What a great way to escape from reality, or in a more positive light, to stimulate my imagination. Early on I didn't get an allowance, so I couldn't buy my own comic books. However, we sometimes went into the "big town," Freeport, Illinois, which had a store where I could find these magical comic books. It was actually a newsstand/magazine store, which likely also carried inexpensive paperback books. This type of shop was popular at that time. I tried not to attract attention as I'd read as many comics as I could for as long as I could get away with it. The comic books played a big role in shaping my imagination and giving me great stories along the way.

HOW AND WHY

I often took my questions about how things worked to my older brother Ray, who once explained soap by telling me that soap doesn't get you clean. "It's the water," he said. "The soap mixes with the oil to 'loosen it up' and then the water rinses it all away." But where do soap bubbles come from? Were they always there but you had to rub the bar of soap to make them? Where did they go? Ray eventually ran out of patience—or answers. I'm still waiting for an answer to where soap bubbles go.

At some point in elementary school every child hears about the way plants grow. In my class, we planted a pea pod in a small clear jar so we could watch the root and stalk emerge and grow. At first everything went according to plan in our classroom experiment. Then I thought about our farm, the cows, and the manure the cows produced in the barn. Then we'd empty the manure into the manure spreader that put it on our fields. This practice was supposed to make the crops grow better, and my peas were crops, right? So, I added a small amount of manure to my pea experiment. It was probably heavy on urine because within a day or so the pea seedling shriveled, turned brown and died. This was how I learned that urine contains a lot of nitrogen. Small amounts of nitrogen accelerate plant growth, but too much burns the plant. Oh well. I think I told people—particularly my teacher—that I had a defective pea pod.

My curiosity only intensified as the years passed. In middle school I became fascinated with chemicals, but I couldn't take a formal chemistry class until high school. That didn't squelch my desire to experiment with common things around me. We had chlorine and ammonia we used to clean the milk tank. At the time, I wasn't aware that mixing these chemicals causes a toxic gas called chloramines. However, I did know that it smelled bad. So, as a prank on my little sister, Cindy, I mixed some up in a pail and called her over to smell it. I expected her to take a little sniff, but she surprised me by sticking her head in the bucket and inhaling a big whiff. The coughing and choking started immediately. I freaked out and ran to get my mom, afraid that I was killing my sister. My mom took it all quite calmly. I think she stayed with my sister and eventually the coughing stopped. I don't think I got in trouble for my prank gone wrong, but I've always regretted it. So much for chemistry!

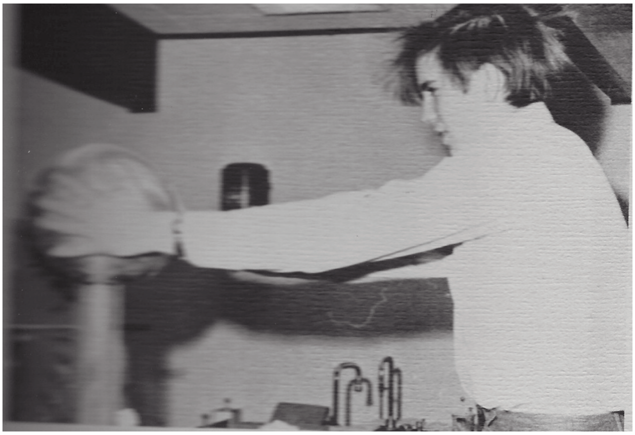
THE JOY OF SPARE PARTS

Around my freshman year of high school one of my brother's classmates came to live with us. His name was Keith Chapman, Chappy to us. Apparently, he had problems at home and my dad took him in. I liked being around Chappy. He was friendly and my dad was on his best behavior around him. For some reason, Chappy and I got the idea to make a minibike and scrounged parts from various places. We collected a rusty bike frame, an old lawnmower motor or something like it, an old bike chain, and a throttle cable that had to be pulled to make the engine go faster.

The last part we needed was a centrifugal clutch, but that had to be ordered in Freeport. The clutch doesn't engage when the engine is idling, but it does engage as you give it gas. We waited and waited for this clutch to arrive and it finally did after about a month —at least. (Needless to say, this was way before Amazon Prime and next-day delivery.) With the last piece in place, I hopped on and headed for the black top road we lived on at the top of a hill. I pointed the bike downhill and gave it gas. It didn't take long until the chain wobbled and got tangled in the rear wheel sprocket, which seized up the wheel. I lurched forward over the handlebars and went skidding down the road. I was scraped and bleeding in several places. I had to push the mangled minibike up the hill, where Chappy was yelling at me for banging up the bike. Even worse, my multiple injuries didn't even get me out of my evening chores. So much for the bike.

WHY MATH, WHY PHYSICS?

In high school I took all of the math and science classes that my small school offered: algebra 1 and 2, geometry, trigonometry, probability and statistics, chemistry and physics. I'd have taken calculus if it had been offered, but I never heard of it until college. A picture of me appears in the Orfordville High School yearbook, in which I'm holding on to the sphere of a Van de Graaff high voltage generator, with my thin hair standing straight out.



Jim holding Van de Graff generator in physics class.

Now I wonder why I took those classes in the first place. What motivated me? My parents didn't care about school. I didn't consider myself a particularly good student and have no memories of studying or doing homework. Yet, unbeknownst to me, I was preparing for what would become a successful career. After high school I took a year of electronic technology classes at the Blackhawk Technical College in Beloit, Wisconsin. I'm not sure what my goal was. All I have is a vague notion of wanting to fix TV sets.

My first job off the farm after high school was at the Beloit Knife Works. It was a division of Black + Decker that produced drill bits. My friend Curt Stahl worked there and told me I should apply. I pestered the hiring person until she relented and gave me a job on the swing shift, 3:30 to 11:30 p.m. I learned a lot before getting fired.

To make a drill bit we took the blank drill bit and inserted it into a special grinding machine. One crank would twist the bit and drive it into the maw of the grinding machine. Another dial would set how much of the groove was drilled into the bit. We would start grinding a little and increase the depth until it was just right. We had an imaging machine with marks on it that showed the acceptable groove depth. I'd put the bit in and check. If I hadn't ground off enough, I'd grind more. Too much and it was thrown away.

We used two types of machines, hot oil cooled (bad) and cool milky water cooled (good). This coolant was all over the place. After a shift on an oil machine, it was like I'd been dipped in a deep fat fryer.

We had a quota, which I remember being something like eight hundred drill bits a shift. It didn't take long before I could do over a thousand bits. This led to one of my important life lessons: Don't shine too bright or you'll piss off your co-workers. I quickly got the message that I wasn't to make too many bits, or the quota would be raised and everyone would have to do more. So, what to do with all of my free time? I'd wander around the factory, exploring, and chatting with people. Well, that didn't make the bosses too happy.

Then, on my last time in the break room I pointed out to my gathered friends how stupid the milk vending machine was. It was a chest style freezer with a horizontal lid you'd lift up, and then you could see all of the milk cartons with their little Mohawk tops popping up between tracks. You'd grab the top and guide it along the track into a chute. Then you'd insert a dime, pull a lever and the milk carton could be pulled out. The flaw in the design, which I demonstrated, was that you could easily squeeze two milk cartons into the chute. With my dime I pulled out two milk cartons and gave one away. The next day when I came to work I was fired for stealing milk! Oops, another life lesson: If you're a pain in the ass the boss will find a way to fire you.

AN UNLIKELY STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

After I decided to join the army and took the standard army aptitude tests, I was pulled aside and the recruiters in charge convinced me to sign up for an extra year of service, which meant I'd receive more electronics training. A beneficial tradeoff for sure. My original assignment easily could have landed me in a rice paddy, which is how people sometimes referred to Vietnam. The term always implied being in the middle of the war and in danger. I'm convinced the military personnel in charge of me didn't want me to be killed.

As it happened, I was promoted frequently. All enlisted (non-officer) personnel start as E1 or private E-1. I was promoted to Private 2nd Class (E-2) at the end of basic training at Fort Leonard Wood. It probably helped that I was one of only two trainees out of the pool of a thousand who got a perfect score on the physical fitness test—all that hard farm work finally paid off.

Stationed at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, I was scheduled to complete three electronics programs over the course of the year, and whoever came in first in the class would be promoted. I finished first in the first two classes, and then second in third class. (The guy who came in first had a degree in physics.) This probably sounds odd to young people today, but this was the first moment in my life that I believed I could go to college.

OVERSEAS FOR THE FIRST TIME

I was posted to Augsburg, Germany, as an E4, or Specialist 4. The Field Station in Augsburg gathered information for the NSA (National Security Agency) on Soviets and East Germans. Augsburg was about one-hundred-fifty miles from the border with East Germany. My first assignment was with a team that fixed equipment whenever it broke. My boss was great, and since I was soon promoted to Specialist 5, I began thinking about a career in the Army.

That idea changed quickly when, for a reason I never discovered, I was transferred to the preventive maintenance team, led by an overweight, overbearing, cigarette- smoking slob. I had a preconceived notion that preventative maintenance was going to be mind-numbingly boring, since it involved taking equipment that was already working perfectly and cleaning the front panel at regular intervals. Or so I thought. It actually turned out to be an okay assignment, but the lousy boss convinced me to leave the Army. Considering what happened to me professionally as the years passed, that decision turned out to be all to the good.

As for the military experience itself, it seemed everyone had his own way of “getting even” with the Army. (Remember that this was not yet a volunteer army but relied on drafting young men aged 18 and older.) That’s why the idea of getting even is a logical extension of being there. In short, I believe most everyone felt trapped and that led the way to slacking off or cutting corners. My specialty was recording equipment, commonly reel to reel tape recorders, but there were many other types, such as voiceprint recorders used to keep tabs on people. Others working in this area would pull their equipment out according to their schedule, but then some left the equipment on their workbench and went off to sleep or play cards. At the end of the shift, they’d put the equipment back in service. In other words, these guys did as little as possible.

My way of getting even was true to type. I would slowly, methodically go over each piece of equipment. I’d study what it was supposed to do, how it worked, and how to measure its functional specifications. If it needed parts replaced, I’d order them and set the equipment aside until the parts arrived. My way of doing things meant I worked on fewer pieces of equipment than my coworkers, but when I was done I knew how each piece worked and how to fix it. It wasn’t long before my coworkers and those working other shifts started leaving my name on equipment they couldn’t fix.

I saw many common equipment failures, so I wrote up change orders for the manufacturer. In other words, if the same problems came up again and again, then the design was faulty and needed to be altered. At the end of my tour I was awarded the Army Commendation Medal, which “*...is awarded to any member of the Armed Forces of the United States other than General Officers who, while serving in any capacity with the Army after 6 December 1941, distinguished himself by heroism, meritorious achievement or meritorious service.*“ (So, I got a medal for taking advantage of the Army!)

While I was in Germany, I took quite a few classes, like map reading, with the idea of being promoted sooner. However, when I learned that I’d have to serve another six years in order to get another promotion—unless another war broke out—I stopped taking classes. For the most part, though, I took classes simply because I was curious. I ended up with an array of choices, because the University of Maryland had made an arrangement to teach classes to the military, even overseas. Perhaps the instructors got a sabbatical out of the assignment. I had the chance to take some practical classes, including a German class, but I also took World Literature and Developmental Psychology.

ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

While still in Germany, I used the library to research what kind of college program was needed to become an electronic technician and the answer was electrical engineering—EE. I had married my high school sweetheart before joining the army and we had two children. So, after I was released from the Army, my wife Kay and our two kids, Jimmy and Rebecca, headed to Madison, Wisconsin. Although this wouldn’t be possible today, I showed up at the university (UW Madison) and simply said I wanted to be an EE. I had to take a test on the spot, and the next thing I knew I was accepted and had signed up for a math class, calculus. I had been warned that I would have to take calculus in my first semester and that it might be challenging. However, it was the first math class for credit in the EE curriculum, so I had no choice but to take it. So, even though I'd never heard of calculus, my typical attitude emerged when I thought, "How bad could it be?"

I wasn't the smartest guy at UW Madison, but being an older student with a family, I had organizational skills and a work ethic most of the younger people hadn't developed yet. After finishing my first year, the university started offering me scholarships. Then, in both my junior and senior years I was chosen for the Outstanding Student of the Year award for the entire college of engineering.

If I could pick one class that was most significant, I'd say it was the medical instrumentation class I had my senior year. We learned about various types of electronic equipment used to monitor the human body. We also did experiments. In one, we injected current spikes into the arm's ulnar nerve and watched the hand twitch. I lost the coin toss and was the one being shocked. Weird, but not painful.

Since much of the equipment we used had been developed by Hewlett-Packard, known as HP, I thought that would be the prime company to work for. So, when companies came to campus to conduct job interviews, I signed up to meet with HP's representative. The interviewer, Dale Davis, who later hired me, told me that I'd been sent an invitation to interview, but I'd never received it. Nevertheless, so much of what happened later in life resulted from going to that interview.

It happened that 1978 and '79 were good years for electrical engineers looking for a job. Many different types of companies offered me a position: cruise missile testing at General Dynamics in San Diego; a job at the Applied Physics Lab at Johns Hopkins University; geophysical engineering for Shell Oil in Houston, and so on. However, only HP offered me a research and development job. In addition, I was told they'd pay for a master's degree program at Stanford University, assuming I'd be accepted. Plus, I could use their facilities and space in their warehouse to build whatever I wanted in my spare time.

I felt like a kid in a candy store. My hunch had been right. HP was clearly the place to be. Every company that I worked for or started later in life can be traced back to the friends I made while at HP. At the time I started working at the facility in San Diego, the division was the leader in pen plotters with around 80 percent market share. But to the group's credit, they recognized that pens had a limited future. Many companies fear developing products that cannibalize their old products, but not HP. They dedicated significant resources into investigating a variety of technologies.

Kay and I and our kids were off to San Diego.

Engineers like to solve problems. If there are no problems handily available, they will create their own problems.
— Scott Adams (Dilbert)

CHAPTER 6

A FAMILY OF MY OWN

> Life is what happens to us while we are making other plans.
>
> — Allen Saunders

By the time we moved to San Diego, Kay and I had already shared a long history, starting in September of 1970, when I started school at Parkview High School in Orfordville, Wisconsin. We had a class that was really a study period, held in a room filled with large round tables also used for lunch. That first day I didn't know anyone at the table, but a pretty girl caught my eye. She didn't stay long because if the kids knew what they were doing, they could be somewhere else during that study time. Later I caught on and joined the AV club, my escape route from study hall.

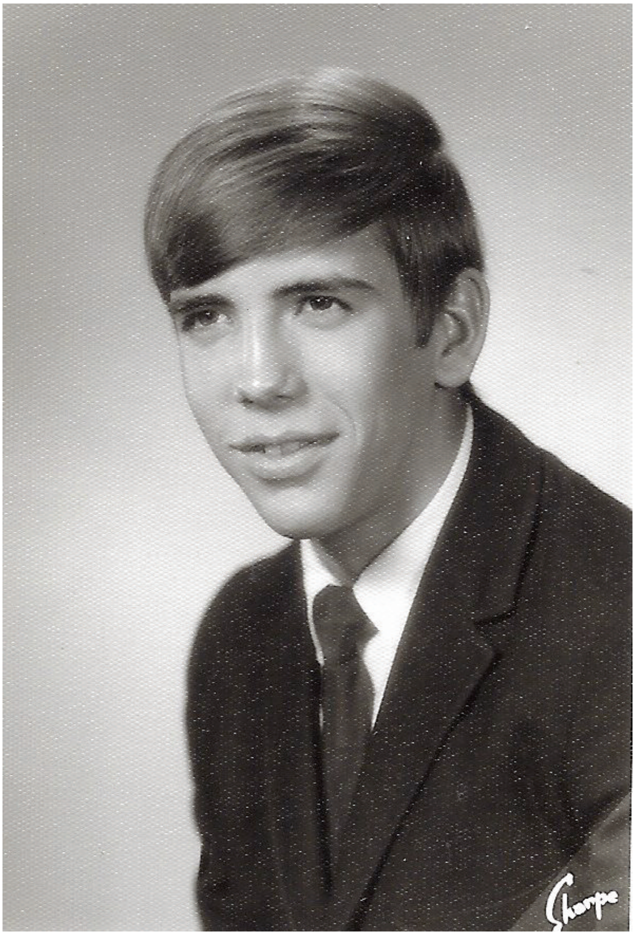
I was acquainted with a few guys at the school because I signed up for the football team. At a school the size of Parkview, if you signed up, you were more or less guaranteed to be on the team. Good thing, too, because I was a skinny one-hundred-thirty pounds. No problem. I was an offensive guard. One of my first friends was

Dave Daniels, and even before school started we'd already had escapades like sneaking into Joe's White Elephant, a bar in Monroe, Wisconsin. I was sixteen, but I think Dave was a year older.

VIKINGS VISITOR
DOWN TO GO

Parkview High School offensive line. The left guard, number 62.

That fall, I hosted a party at my folks' house on Shopiere Road outside of Beloit, Wisconsin. It was a cool house and vacant at the time because my parents were living in the farmhouse south of Orfordville. The living room was about one thousand square feet with a thirty-foot-long picture window looking down the hill toward Turtle Creek. Dave brought his sister Kay, the pretty girl I briefly saw the first day of school. Apparently, I'm not the most observant person. This was a small school, but I didn't remember her, and she reminded me that we briefly sat together the first day. Kay was a cheerleader and I was on the football team, which sounds like a match right out of the teen movies at the time. We spent a lot of time on the night of the party talking and then dated for the rest of the school year.



Jim in Parview High School senior picture.

A little over a year later, around February of 1972, Kay told me she was pregnant. We knew the basics of what people referred to at the time as "the birds and bees," but somehow didn't think pregnancy was going to apply to us. I didn't know what I, or we, would do next. She was a senior in high school. I'd graduated the year before and was working in a feed mill in Orfordville for minimum wage and with no benefits like health insurance. Back then, at least where I lived, it wasn't uncommon for girls in high school to have a baby, but I didn't happen to know of any.

It may seem strange now, but at the time, abortion didn't even come up in a conversation. In fact, I'm not sure I even knew there was such a thing. But ignorance aside, in terms of the times, abortion was illegal in Wisconsin, and the Supreme Court decision in the famous case of Roe v. Wade was still a year away. In our case, terminating the pregnancy wasn't even an option on the table. It was also not uncommon for girls to be sent away to have the baby, which was then put up for adoption. I knew of a girl whose family arranged that. Most often, though, the girl would keep the baby. Sometimes the father would stick around and sometimes not. As I recall, I didn't have a plan and I didn't tell anyone about the pregnancy. I was likely in a kind of foggy denial, hoping that if I ignored the problem it would go away.

Eventually, we found an obstetrician in Janesville, and after the first or perhaps the second visit, the doctor called Kay's house and spoke to her parents! That seems shocking today, but this was a different era, long before HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) laws and regulations, which assure patient privacy.

Needless to say, not long after, I was confronted with "the talk" with Kay's father, Frank Daniels. He went on to describe the challenges of marriage, to which I responded something like: "You make a good point, and I can see I'm not ready to get married." Not the right answer. As a matter of fact, I was to get married–soon.

A GRADUATION AND A WEDDING

Kay's parents were devout Catholics–and Kay had *eleven* siblings. At that time, a non-Catholic marrying a Catholic meant going to a priest for religious training. Kay and I had several hour-long sessions during which I was schooled in the ways of the church.

Although not religious, I'd been confirmed in the Methodist church and had just enough "book learning" about the Bible to annoy the priest. Given the situation that brought me to him in the first place, I must have been insufferable. My questions alone would have brought impatient eye rolls from most adults. I asked the priest why, when the Egyptian Pharaoh in Exodus was willing to let the people of Israel go, God then hardened the heart of the Pharaoh. Then the Pharaoh changed his mind, only to get punished further. I don't remember how he explained that as an act of a loving god, but I'm sure that the priest was as glad as I was when these sessions were over.

On Saturday, June 3, 1972, the first weekend after Kay graduated from high school, we were married at the Footville, Wisconsin, Catholic church. My friend Rick Garland was the best man. The bride's maid was Sunny Chequer, Kay's friend and an exchange student from Brazil. It was a small wedding. I don't think it was a super warm day, but I was sweating profusely. Afterward, there was a reception with ham sandwiches that Kay's mother, Betty Ruth Daniels, and her family had made.

My whole family liked Kay. She was very pleasant with everyone, quick to smile and always helpful. After our marriage we stayed with my parents in our Beloit house on Shopiere Road, just east of I-90.

LEAVING HOME FOR GOOD

About a month after the wedding, I reported for active duty in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Before entering the military, my sister's friend, Dean Rockey, who'd already served in the Army, gave me some advice: "Don't let them know who you are." I was disappointed when I was issued our army dull green clothes called fatigues, and Smith was written over the right breast. I had taken Rockey literally, so I didn't grasp what he really meant, which was to keep my head down, go with the flow, don't stand out. I learned this second lesson the hard way later.

For me, basic training at Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, was like summer camp (we called it Fort Lost in the Woods Misery). For one thing, getting roused from our beds at 5:00 a.m. was no big deal for a dairy farmer. Three times a day, we were fed all we could eat. The drill sergeants could yell at us all the time but weren't allowed to hit us.

Basic training was full of marching and exercise, but I favored weapons training. We got to fire bazookas and machine guns. A scalding hot machine gun shell flew out and down my shirt leaving a burn mark for years. The grenade launcher would make a whoomph sound as the grenade left the barrel, and when it landed seconds later and a few hundred yards away, it produced an impressive explosion. I've jokingly bragged that I'm an Army marksman. However, marksman is the lowest rating you can get and still graduate from basic training. The levels above marksman are sharpshooter and expert, which are readily purchased in any Army store. I was actually a lousy shot, in part because my eyesight wasn't great. If targets were one hundred yards away I couldn't make them out at all.

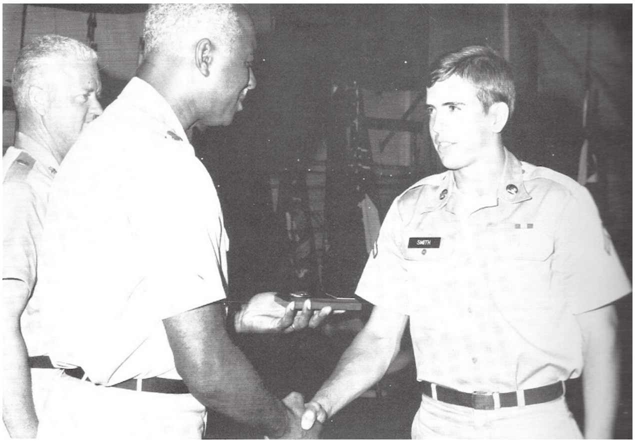
One exercise was called "battle sight zeroing" of our weapon, the M16. Don't call it a gun! One fellow in my platoon made that mistake and the drill sergeant had him running around the field with the M16 yelling and gesturing, "This is my rifle (raise the rifle), this is my gun (holds his crotch), this is for fighting (M16), this is for fun (crotch)."

On rainy days at the base, we had to fire at a target just 20 yards away. The objective was to fire three rounds into an area about the size of a quarter. Precision is putting multiple rounds into the same spot. Accuracy is getting close to the target. We had to do both, but I was achieving neither. After each round, the sight on the rifle would be adjusted. But I wasn't consistent enough. It seemed like forever that I was prone in an indentation in the Missouri red clay filled with water. That belly down position was supposed to be the most accurate. Maybe so, but my fingers were pale soggy prunes. At some point I put two rounds into the target and used my pencil to make the third hole in the target. That's how I passed rifle training!

I was better at the physical fitness test, which consisted of five events. For a perfect score you had to beat a specified time in five events: overhead horizontal ladder; run, dodge and jump on a figure eight course; inverted crawl; sit-ups; and a one-mile run. The event that was the hardest for most to get a perfect score was running a mile in under five minutes, fifty seconds in combat boots and fatigues. Fortunately, I ran the mile for my high school track team and that wasn't too hard for me to do.

Just before we embarked on the physical fitness test, our drill sergeant challenged us to get a perfect score. Anyone who managed a perfect score would be treated to all of the hamburgers and beer he could consume. After I won the test and got my reward, my friend's warning came to me, "Don't let them know your name." For the rest of basic training when the drill sergeant wanted to make an example, he'd say something like, "Smith, get out here and show the platoon how to do fifty push-ups!"

In the photo, I'm receiving an award at basic training graduation for being one of two in the battalion to achieve a perfect score on the physical fitness test.



Jim receiving physical fitness award at basic training graduation.

The fourth week of basic training we had a Saturday off. Some soldiers got an off-base pass and went to the bars, tattoo shops and massage parlors that waited just outside the gate. I walked to the center of the base and checked out the facilities. There was a sports center with basketball courts, gyms, and handball courts. The library not only had books, but also games, music–and more. This was one of the rare days in my life where I felt light as a feather. I didn't have a care in the world. I could just explore like a kid in a candy store.

The next weekend Kay, who'd been living with my parents in our Beloit house, drove down for a visit. The base had converted a space that was sort of like a barracks into a shabby hotel that military families could stay in. Being seven months pregnant, this must have been quite an eight-hour drive. I would sneak out of the barracks for an hour or two between the time we finished our training and lights out. It was about a fifteen-minute jog, but this was still the honeymoon phase of our marriage and I was grateful and glad she was there. That's why I risked some kind of punishment to sneak out and see her. Fortunately, I wasn't caught.

The following weekend a friend and I hitchhiked from Fort Leonard Wood to my folk's house near Beloit. I was amazed at how quickly someone would stop and pick up a couple of guys in military uniform. Sometimes a woman picked us up on one side of a small town and dropped us off on the other side of town. When we got to Polo, Illinois, a couple of guys picked us up that were just aimlessly driving around drinking beer. They told us that if we bought them a case of beer, they'd drive us the hour to my house. I was only eighteen, and the legal age was twenty-one, but of course, they knew a guy. We bought it and off we went. By the time they dropped us off, I was quite buzzed, because they were happy to share the beer we bought for them.

Graduation was Friday, September 15, 1972. Kay and Mom drove down for the event and I went home with them. Kay was quite far along, but we didn't know Jimmy would be born only eleven days later.

Jim at the end of the Army basic training.

WE HAVE A SON

I had only two weeks off between basic training and the start of electronics training at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, a base near Boston. At a regular visit to the OB-GYN, only a few days into my time off, the doctor told Kay her body showed signs of being ready to give birth. He predicted a quick delivery and said that if our child wasn't born by September 26, he'd induce labor, which is what happened. We went to the hospital in Janesville, Wisconsin. Kay went off to the labor room and I went to fill out the required paperwork to admit her into the hospital. When I got back, I paced back and forth in a small waiting room. Back then, long before ultrasounds and gender reveal parties, we didn't know the baby's sex. It was always a surprise.

At that time, I never considered being with Kay during labor or participating in the birth in the delivery room–and it's likely I wouldn't have been allowed into those rooms. The practice of having fathers present through labor delivery, common now, would develop a few years later. I didn't have to pace for long, though. After an hour, maybe two, a nurse came out and told me I had a healthy baby boy. I wasn't concerned about the baby being a boy or a girl. We only wanted it to be healthy. We had only picked out a boy's name, James–Jimmy–after me, and Frank, the first name of both of his grandfathers.

Being in the Army meant all our OB-GYN and hospital bills were paid by the military insurance group. What a relief! I never had a plan for how to pay the medical bills–most people with lower-wage jobs were in that boat.

LIFE AT FORT DEVENS

A few days after Jimmy's birth, I was off to Fort Devins for my next training. I don't remember why I didn't drive, but it could have been because we only had one car. I probably flew because the army paid for it. But I was in an army barracks with no way to get around. I soon began checking the bulletin board on base where we'd find apartment postings. I found the cheapest one, which was in Fitchburg, a twenty-minute drive from the base. Since I didn't have a car I took it sight unseen.

After about a month, I flew back to Beloit to pick up Kay and Jimmy. We piled all of our possessions into a 1970 Chevy Nova for the seventeen-hour drive to Fitchburg. Staying in a hotel was out of the question. No money for that. We eventually pulled up to a dilapidated wooden two-story building. Even worse, some Black kids from the neighborhood were taunting the white landlady, who was hurling racist rants at them. Wow. This is what I'd gotten us into. But we had no choice. We met the landlady and she showed us the place. The main room was a combined kitchen and living room, a small bedroom, and a smaller bathroom.

A large black stove dominated the kitchen of this place. Common at the time, it was originally a wood burning stove that was converted to gas. It served as both a stove to cook on and as the only heat source in the apartment. A gas company technician was there but wouldn't turn on the gas to the apartment because the stove was too unsafe. The landlady resisted paying for any repairs but eventually relented.

The tech installed a pilot light thermocouple so that the main gas line would not turn on and suffocate us if the pilot light wasn't lit. It was the first of November, gray and cold outside and inside. The windows were single paned and so poorly sealed the shabby curtains fluttered in the breeze. No sign of insulation anywhere.

We put Jimmy's bassinet in the more frigid bedroom. Kay was worried that he'd freeze to death, so she piled blankets over and around him and tucked in a hot water bottle for good measure. After a couple of weeks Jimmy had red spots all over his body. We thought these had to be signs of measles or chickenpox or something worse, so we took him to a doctor on the base. He said it was a prickly heat rash and we were cooking the kid!

This situation must have been miserable for Kay. I'd leave for the day to take classes on the base and she was left isolated in this dump. No where to walk and no telephone. It was probably good that she had Jimmy to take care of, but she also was a new mom cut off from any source of support. She was the seventh of eleven children so she did have experience taking care of younger children. Fortunately, after a month, we moved into a small apartment above a pizza shop in Ayer, a town right next to the base. The cockroaches and the smell of pizza were problems but it was a much better situation.

MANY MOVES LATER

After I finished my training at Ft. Devens I was transferred to Vint Hill Farms Field Station (FHFFS) near Washington DC. FHFFS was established in 1942 and was one of the most important intelligence gathering sites during World War II. Around the middle of September 1973, we loaded all of our belongings back into the Chevy Nova and drove to a little motel outside of the base. I was to be there for one month of training on a new type of recording system.

The recording system used a two-inch-wide reel to reel tape and was set up to record a broadband signal that had been encrypted by the Soviets, which is what we called the military in the Soviet Union. The NSA sent orders to record a specified frequency band at some particular time and the machine operators would do it. My job was to set it up and make sure that it was running properly and fix it if it quit working.

For the first week I stayed in the motel with Kay and Jimmy in the evenings and trained during the day. On September 26, Jimmy's birthday, I had three classmates, Ralph Feaster, Bob Toepfer, and Greg Baur join us for a birthday celebration. The highlight was one candle stuck in a cupcake for Jimmy to blow out. I remained friends for many years with Greg Baur because we both got electrical engineering degrees at the University of Wisconsin.

After Jimmy’s birthday Kay drove back to Beloit, Wisconsin, to stay with my parents while I finished training. The training went well but I never used those skills. Instead, I was sent to Augsburg, Germany, to a site that didn’t use it. After I finished training I flew to Chicago and took the bus to the Clock Tower Inn bus stop outside of Rockford where Kay picked me up. I had about one week before flying to Augsburg. The most memorable part of my time home was the afternoon we couldn’t find Jimmy. We hunted for him and eventually located him with my father on the roof of the house. We had no idea why he’d taken our son up on the roof, but because we had little trust in his judgment, we were concerned!

WE HAVE A DAUGHTER

Once again I was off to a new army post to get settled and search for a place for the family to live, while I lived in the barracks at the Sheridan Kaserne U.S. military base. Practicing German near a U.S. military base is difficult because almost everyone you come in contact with speaks English. Because I had learned a little German, the first time I left the base with a friend, I ordered a couple of beers in my best German. The girl behind the bar looked at me and said, “What?” I asked in English, and she immediately said, “Sure!”

From a notice on the base bulletin board, I found a small one-bedroom apartment about a mile from the base. It had a large closet that we used as Jimmy’s room. The pleasant German landlady lived next door, but since she didn’t appear to speak a word of English, that provided us a chance to practice.

I was in Germany about a month before Kay and Jimmy flew to Munich and I took the train to pick them up. While I was in line at the train station to buy our tickets I heard a voice say, “Hey, are you Jim Smith?” Not something I expected to hear in Germany. When I turned around I recognized a girl from my Algebra 2 class at Turner High School, located near Beloit and where I went for my junior year of high school. We chatted for a bit–sometimes it does seem like a small world.

As I entered the airport, I noticed a strange vibe. German military police were patrolling with machine guns. I hadn't considered it, but in September of 1972, nine Israeli athletes were killed by a group of Palestinian terrorists. A tense atmosphere reflected the aftermath of that tragedy.

I waited for Kay to come into the terminal building for what seemed like way too long. A stream of passengers from the plane passed me and then the stream stopped. This was in the days when cell phones showed up only in science fiction novels so I had no way of knowing what was going on. In fact, I wasn't sure that she boarded the plane in the first place. Eventually, though, she came into the terminal. She had assumed that I would come and meet her in a waiting area just off the plane. In those days, before tightened U.S. (and elsewhere) airport security after the 9/11 terrorist attack, we were free to walk to the area where we could meet family and friends as they deplaned.

Looking back, this was likely the first time Kay had flown, and she'd had a fairly miserable flight and didn't feel well. But she wasn't a complainer. We then had to walk with all of the luggage to the train station a couple of blocks away to catch our train from Munich to Augsburg, followed by a trolley ride to get us close to our apartment. I'm sure she was glad to be done traveling for a while.

My typical workday was the mid shift from 11:30 p.m. to 7:00 a.m. I worked at the United States Army Security Agency (USASA) Augsburg Field station on the Gablingen Kaserne base, about five miles from our apartment. The military bus from the Sheridan

Kaserne passed close by and would stop at about 11:00 p.m. to pick me up. I don't remember how I worked it out, but it was a great arrangement for me. Shortly after arriving at work around midnight, we had a break for dinner. At around 6:00 a.m. we had another break for breakfast. At 3:00 a.m., we had a coffee break, although I didn't start drinking coffee until decades later. It was a great work schedule for me.

I'd get back to the apartment around 7:30 a.m. Depending on what we'd decide to do, I'd either sleep more in the morning or wait and sleep before leaving in the evening.

Kay and I had little money so we didn't eat out or buy much, but we did get ourselves two bicycles and a bike seat for Jimmy. We used this means of transportation to get around to do things like shop at the base commissary (grocery store) or the base PX (department store). We were about a thirty-minute bike ride to the Augsburg Eiskanal, the kayak slalom course built for the Olympics the year before. That was a pleasant place to go for a picnic and watch amateur kayakers try not to drown going down the course. I'd watch a kayak float upside down for as long as I could hold my breath before someone would jump in and tip up the struggling occupant.

The Romans had built Augsburg over two thousand years ago, which was part of making it an interesting town to live in. We learned that Mozart had lived in a house there for a while. The holidays were a festive time in Augsburg, and before Christmas the markets were lit up and filled with colorful Christmas gifts.

Overall, I was quite happy there. For one thing, I was successful at work and liked what I was doing. I also enjoyed exploring with my family. Kay and I hadn't come from families where trips to Europe were an expected part of adult life, so everything was not only new, but novel in our limited world view. I suspect that Kay had a much tougher time, however. Fortunately, she had Jimmy, but for the first time in her life she was really cut off from her big family. We had a couple of friends but mostly she lived her days in a sea of friendly foreigners.

When we found Rebecca was on the way, Kay put her foot down and said, “I’m not riding my bike to the hospital to deliver a baby!”

I bought a ’61 Volkswagen Beetle with an 1100 cc motor. These days, motorcycles have bigger motors. It looked like the picture but it wasn’t in great shape. The bottom was rusting out so badly that I could start to see the ground below my feet. But I could afford it and it got us around.

On November 25, I came home at my usual time and decided to stay up and go to sleep later. Late that morning, just as I was getting ready to go to bed, Kay said it was time to head to the hospital. We packed a couple of things, put Jimmy in the car (no seat belts or car seats at this time), and headed first to one of the bases that had daycare and dropped Jimmy off. Then we set off to another base to check our mail.

Okay, you’re wondering why we detoured, but checking mail was so important to us. We didn’t even have a phone. Finally, we headed to the base hospital, and soon learned Kay was so close to delivering that we had to pause at each flight of stairs for a contraction. Of course, you might ask why stairs were involved. Maybe there was an elevator I didn’t know about. Or more likely it was just me heading to the stairs because why look for an elevator when a staircase was right in front of us. I still think everyone should use the stairs.

Like the first time, when we got to the top the staff took one look at Kay and took her away while I went to check her into the hospital. By the time I returned, Rebecca had been born. Whew, we just made it!

The army hospital was a good deal financially. We paid something like a dollar a day, but it wasn't a luxurious place. The previous summer it had been closed for health and safety reasons and everyone was moved into tents. Kay was in a big room with about ten beds. I don't remember her having any roommates, however. Rebecca was placed in a bassinet at the foot of Kay's bed. If she were to stay more than three days they gave her instructions on how to flip the mattress. I don't remember a TV anywhere, but if you wanted to listen to the radio, a room for that was down the hall.

I've used the word tough to describe Kay, and she had a lot to cope with as a military spouse. The week after Rebecca was born she hosted a belated Thanksgiving meal attended by two friends in our small apartment. Our one-bedroom apartment was pretty full, and now it was Rebecca's turn to have her crib in the closet. Jimmy was moved out to sleep on the couch in our little living room. Fortunately, at that point we only had about five months to go before returning to the States.

We did as much traveling as we could with our limited amount of money. The Army was good about organizing trips. One day we took a bus trip to the mad King Ludvig's Castle, only a 20-minute drive south of Augsburg. That was impressive. We were told that Walt Disney got his inspiration for the Magic Kingdom from that castle.

Another day we went to the Dachau concentration camp. It was about a half hour drive to the outskirts of Munich. I had no idea about the suffering Jews endured, but that was my introduction. Nearly the whole place had been destroyed but key parts had been reconstructed as a sort of museum. There were gruesome images showing experiments that were done on the prisoners. We had brought a sack lunch and the picnic tables were next to the old crematorium. I'd never had a more gloomy and disturbing meal in my life.

In order to maintain morale among the troops and their families, the Army organized activities, including short trips. Over one three-day weekend, Kay and I went on an Army sponsored trip to Paris. Jimmy was going to go with us but he had a very painful arm. The doctors couldn't figure out why it was hurting him so badly so they kept him in the hospital. So, we went on our trip. Thinking back, I'd never do that today, but it seemed okay at the time.

In Paris we spent our day's food allowance on our first light sit-down meal. After that, we bought all of our meals from street vendors or the grocery store. It was very impressive to me. I hadn't been off the farm very long and then I was walking past the Eiffel Tower, strolling down the Champs Elysees and visiting the Louvre. We got home and picked Jimmy up from the hospital, but the doctors never figured out what was wrong.

For our last big trip, we loaded up Jimmy and Rebecca into our little Beetle. Rebecca would sleep in a hollow space between the backseat and the back window. I know for sure I wouldn't do that now. We stuck to German speaking countries because I had rudimentary German skills by then. We drove southeast about three hours to Zurich, a pleasant place, but now, all I can remember is that it has the largest church clock in Europe. From there we wanted to drive to Innsbruck, which is straight east but I wasn't sure what road to take. On our little map, I'd see that many roads would zig zag and then stop. I didn't realize at the time that the Alps were in our way.

When I got on the road it went up and up and up. At some point I started to see metal fence-like structures cantilevering over the road. How odd, I thought. Then as our little car struggled higher, we came to snow, which the fences kept from swamping the road.

Eventually, we made it to the top, quickly crossed Liechtenstein and made our way to Innsbruck. My main memory of Innsbruck was asking at the train station where I might find a good and *nicht* *zu teuer* (not too expensive) restaurant, and understanding the reply, which for me was the hardest part. On the way home we passed through Oberammergau where the Passion Play is performed every ten years. It is a beautiful town with many of the houses beautifully painted.

ANOTHER CHANGE, ANOTHER PHASE

In March 1973, the U.S. withdrew from Vietnam, which meant the military was too large for its current needs. In 1974, I was informed I'd be discharged a year early! Other than the days my kids were born, it was the happiest day of my life. All of a sudden instead of two years to go, I'd be free the next year.

At some point in 1974, I went to the base library to research the possibilities of what I could go to college for. I was already an electronics technician in the army, so what was the next step? A library book suggested that electrical engineering would be the thing. I looked up colleges in Wisconsin in another book. The University of Wisconsin at Madison looked like the clear choice. That became my plan.

In April 1973, Kay, Jimmy, and Rebecca flew back to Beloit to stay with my folks and I moved back into the barracks. At the end of May I flew to Fort Dix, New Jersey to be processed out of the Army. By the time I arrived in Chicago I'd been up for over twenty-four hours. As was my typical routine I got on the Van Galder bus from O'Hare to Janesville. I'd agreed to meet Kay and my folks at the Clock Tower Inn stop outside of Rockford. Every time I sat down for a minute I fell asleep. Quickly, I'd wake up with a start. After a while I just walked back and forth on the bus. I didn't want to fall asleep and miss my stop. The photo was taken soon after arriving home.

Kay, Jim, Dad, and Mom. Just off the bus after my Army discharge.

OFF TO THE UNIVERSITY

Once again, I lived in my parents' house in Beloit, now with Kay, Jimmy, and Rebecca. I believe we stayed with them because we didn't have much money and couldn't part with what we had. During this summer my dad claims he tried to commit suicide with a shotgun in the basement. You have to be a very bad shot to miss something at three feet with a shotgun. He succeeded in blowing a hole through the basement ceiling and into a sofa end table in the living room. Fortunately, no one was in the living room or that could have been a lot worse. No police or anyone was called about it. It was just "living with Frank."

It was only a one-hour drive to the University of Wisconsin in Madison, so one morning in the summer of 1975 I drove to the admissions office. I explained that I wanted to sign up to be an electrical engineer. As I said earlier, I passed a test and was accepted. The university gave me credit for the courses I took in the Army as well as classes I took in vocational school. Therefore, I didn't have to take any electives. Oh boy, nothing but math, science, and engineering classes for me. The first semester was filled with calculus, physics, and chemistry.

Kay and I looked for a place to live and found the Bayview Apartments. It was government subsidized, low-income housing situated between Park and Washington Streets, about a mile from the engineering part of campus. For $100, one third of what the GI Bill paid me, we had a three-bedroom apartment with electricity and heat included. Being married with two kids, we were entitled to several social supports, including welfare and food programs that provided staples like milk and cheese (we were in Wisconsin after all), and free health care.

This experience has made me think about paying taxes in a different way than others I've run into over the years. I took advantage of every social program I could, but then I ended up making a lot of money and paying millions in taxes. So, I don't begrudge taxes. I hope I'm able to help some other struggling kids to get on their feet.

Because I had a family, I viewed doing well in college as a matter of survival. I had a schedule that I put in a grid on a piece of paper with class times, study times, and work. I finished studying at 9:00 p.m., because when I didn't I'd have study nightmares. Like dreams of being trapped in a calculus formula. I allotted two hours of studying for each hour of class. I tried to study the material before the lecture so I knew what questions to ask. I'd solve every assigned problem. I wasn't the smartest, but I doubt many students worked harder than me. I was still surprised when my first report card came in and I had an A in calculus and in every other class as well.

My mom, dad, Kay, and me, when I'm receiving the Kurt F Wendt Outstanding Senior of the Year for the whole college of engineering.

For my three years at Madison, I studied, worked, and spent time with my family. The only student friend I had was Greg Bauer, my friend from Fort Devins. On weekends, we'd go to the Dakota, Illinois, area and stay with my sister Sue, or sometimes, with my brother Ray. If not my side of the family, then Kay's. Her brother Frank lived in Mt. Horeb, just a little west of Madison. Often we'd stay with her sister Cecelia in Janesville, or with her brother Bob in Monroe, Wisconsin.

I don't remember family visiting us, mostly because we didn't have much room and our apartment complex was scary to most people. Being low income, there were often people hanging out in common areas or on their front porches drinking beer. I'd heard about a rape and a murder during our time there, but for some reason I didn't feel unsafe.

My most memorable recreation was Saturday UW football games at Camp Randall Stadium. As years went on I figured out how to get more and more student season tickets. By my senior year I had six seats. Kay's sister Cecilia and her husband Randy had one pair and we invited different relatives to fill the other seats. It was a big party. Supposedly, no alcohol was allowed, but most people smuggled booze in. I'd often have a flask of rum and buy a plastic cup full of Coca Cola from a vendor, fill it a little with rum, drink a little and repeat. After a while it was just rum but I was too cheap to buy two drinks. The football team didn't win many games that season, but that didn't matter, and we had a great time.

INTERVIEWS AND DECISIONS

As college was wrapping up I started to think about jobs. By this time, it was 1978, a good time for electrical engineers. Companies from all over the country came to Madison to interview us. I also traveled to Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab, IBM in Denver, HP and General Dynamics in San Diego, General Dynamics in Dallas, Shell Oil in Houston and others. I was worried that Kay would insist on staying in Wisconsin, but to help prepare to leave, we took camping trips to Florida during two Christmas breaks. I already decided I wanted to live in a place warmer than Wisconsin.

One of my first job interviews was with Shell Oil in Houston. They put Kay and me up in the Hyatt Regency in downtown Houston. Before this, we'd moved around during my time in the Army and stayed in a couple of run down motels. This was special. As part of their recruitment, Shell assigned a host couple to show us the sights. We had dinner in a place with tablecloths and a waiter to remove a cork from a wine bottle! I typically drank Pabst Blue Ribbon beer, and if I drank wine it had a screw top. (Odd, screw caps have made a comeback).

If I'd signed on with Shell, I'd lead an oil exploration team in the folded belt region of Utah. We'd helicopter in, record seismological data, and take the data back to Houston. It sounded exciting and the pay was good, but it wasn't what I'd been studying for the last three years.

A month later I interviewed with Johnson Controls in Racine, Wisconsin. Kay and I drove over from Madison, but when we arrived, no one seemed to know we were coming. Our eventual host took Kay and me to a greasy spoon diner in downtown Racine. At the end of the day, they said that I should hear from them in a couple of weeks, but if I didn't, I should call them because they probably lost my information. I didn't hear from them and they certainly didn't hear from me.

After my interview with HP in San Diego, I knew that was where I wanted to go. I had the most difficult technical interview there than in any other company, to the point I was surprised I passed. On the tour of the facility, they explained that I could use the full resources of the company to build whatever I wanted to during my free time. I would have 24-hour access to a small machine shop set up for engineers, all of the parts in the stock room, the computer center, and the electronics labs. I felt like a kid in a candy store.

When HP offered me a job, I was asked to return with Kay so that they could show us housing and things to do around San Diego. I think it was a little difficult for Kay but she agreed to go. The HP job offer turned out to be far more than a simple relocation. If our lives had already changed, during the next decades they raced ahead even more.

Jimmy, Jim, Rebecca, Kay about 1978.

Change is good. You go first.
— Scott Adams (Dilbert)

CHAPTER 7

THE EVOLUTION OF PRINTERS AND OTHER ADVENTURES

I always thought I was good at solving problems, but then I realized that the problems I was solving were ones I had created myself.

— Scott Adams (Dilbert)

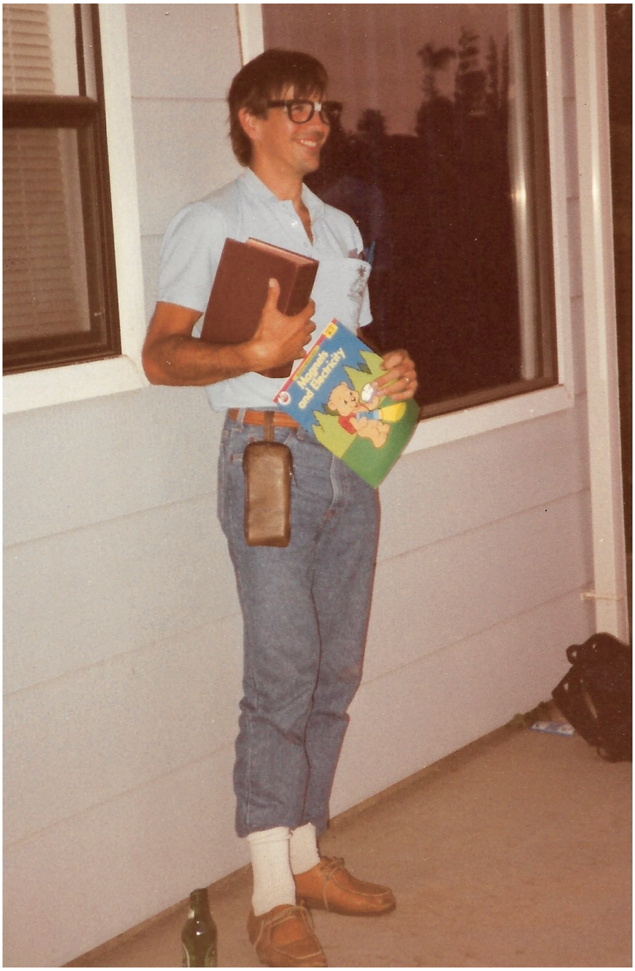
In general, if we use computers, we use printers. This was especially true years ago before the age of multi-purpose devices, including cell phones, and downloadable documents. Anyone who started using a personal printer in the 1980s viewed them as a necessary device to get various jobs done.

My first project for Hewlett-Packard was working on a continuous inkjet printer, first called Van Gogh and later called Satyr, which pushed a stream of high-pressure ink out of a tiny nozzle. The stream was shaken like a garden hose with a piezoelectric crystal to form a series of drops flying through the air. As the drops pinched off in a charge ring, electrons were trapped on selected ink drops. The non-charged drops would go straight into a gutter and be recycled. The charged drops would be deflected above the stream by a high voltage deflection plate and hit the paper.

The whole thing was a remarkably complicated Rube Goldberg machine! Rube Goldberg was a cartoonist, who capitalized on the jokes about machines designed to do one thing in an overly complicated way. In my lifetime, if anyone said a project or a task was a Rube Goldberg machine, everyone knew exactly what was meant.

I started out developing the firmware that controlled the printer. I had a Fortran software class and a PDP11 machine language programming class. (Those terms are ancient history today.) I wasn't actually qualified for the job, but since the electrical engineers developed the computers it seemed natural they also would program them. Soon after, though, we started hiring trained computer scientists and the quality of the code improved. On this project I worked with five men, Alex Babiarz, Phil Maiorca, Bob Ciardella, Martin Stone, and Don La, all of whom I'd work with again at ASYMTEK. More than 20 engineers worked on the project, many of whom became lifelong friends.

In a few months I got the firmware working well enough to do some rough printing. One day I was debugging the firmware while other engineers were getting the pumps, electronics, and mechanics running. I'd programmed in the dot matrix pattern of an 'R' that I grabbed from an article, "Drop Charging and Deflection in an Electrostatic Inkjet Printer," published in the *IBM Journal of Research and Development* (Volume: 21, Issue: 1, Jan. 1977). I hit the GO button, which sent the carriage moving across the paper. Sue Hudson, a mechanical engineer, exclaimed, "Look at all of the Rs." I wondered how she knew I was working on Rs, but after a couple of minutes. I realized the device actually printed something! We celebrated the first moment we put something recognizable on paper.



Jim dressed up as a stereotypical engineer at a roast. Jim left HP for Asymtek in 1990.

WELCOME TO THE “WORLD’S FAIR”

We had a division review during my first year at HP. I’d describe a division review as our version of a world’s fair. The CEO of HP at the time, John Young, reviewed what we were doing, and the executives had many meetings and lab tours. By this time, I’d switched from firmware to electronics development. I was in charge of creating various components of the inkjet printer: the 3,000-volt power supply, which was needed for the drop deflection plate; the 200-volt supply for the drop charge ring; the dynamic RAM memory board; and the I/O (Input/Output) board. I had plenty to do.

Leading up to the lab tour, we all worked long hectic hours on our projects. On the day of the event, several of us were carefully babysitting the fragile printer prototype. It was all working splendidly as we watched our project manager give the executives a presentation about 20 feet away. Then disaster struck. The 3,000-volt cable broke and dragged, sparking, across the printer. Ink was flying and the computer shut down. We engineers flew into action like doctors around a patient in cardiac arrest. I grabbed a soldering gun to reattach the power line, while others rebooted the computer and cleaned up the printer. The printer stirred to life just as we saw the group get out of their chairs and come over to the prototype. It printed flawlessly. John Young said a few kind words and off they went. Whew!

The next day our project team went to eat at Fidel's in Solana Beach. It was my first time there and I ordered the tostada suprema, the full sized one. This seemingly small event was memorable because what arrived was the biggest plate of food I'd ever seen. I could eat a lot, but by the time I gave up I was stuffed to the gills and had a blister on my finger from the fork.

THE ROCKY ROAD TO INNOVATION

I enjoyed all of my colleagues, so you can imagine I felt bad when I almost killed Phil Maiorca. We called our prototype a breadboard, but there was no board. The frame was made of half inch thick slabs of aluminum. The frame wasn't grounded. Now, I don't know who should have grounded it, but apparently, nobody thought to do it.

As I mentioned, I developed the 3,000-volt supply that went up to the printhead. Everything was pretty well insulated. However, imagine the tiniest of a stream of electrons making their way to the big chunk of ungrounded aluminum. Over time it could “float” up in voltage to something like the 3,000-volt power supply.

Phil Maiorca was doing some work on his printer control electronics when he touched something grounded and at the same time the charged frame. Like a lightning bolt, all of the electrons jumped off and threw Phil to the ground. He let out a yelp and flew back into the cubicle’s partition wall. When he could get his voice he hollered my name, assuming only the high voltage power supply could zap him that badly. Nothing appeared to be wrong at first, but it didn’t take me too long to find the ungrounded frame. That never happened again.

THE NEXT STAGE

After almost two years the project was canceled. I was relieved, because it looked like an expensive, unreliable maintenance hassle. Just before this, Dewey Baker and Dan Allen returned from HP Labs with a small one nozzle thermal inkjet prototype. A little tank dispensed diethylene glycol onto a tantalum aluminum resistor that heated up the fluid to above boiling and ejected the fluid onto thermally sensitive paper. The little nozzle was strapped onto one of our XY flatbed plotters and would make geometric patterns that we called birthday plots. Enter your birthday and a unique pattern would get drawn out. Since this was going to be “simple” to turn into a product, our other project was canceled.

On our next large format plotters, I was made a project lead for electronics and firmware. This kept me busy for a couple of years, and then I was asked to be the project manager for our first thermal inkjet printer. Another team had been working for the last two years on how to turn that "simple" (meaning devilishly complicated) inkjet device into something practical and reliable.

The two print cartridge system was my most important contribution to this project. The cartridge team wanted to develop one print cartridge and then fill it with four different colors of ink: black, magenta, cyan, and yellow (the primary colors in a subtractive color system). But having four cartridges made the product bigger and too expensive for a $1,000 printer. It took some weeks of debate but I eventually convinced the cartridge leader, Dan Allen, to make one black cartridge and a second cartridge that was magenta, cyan, and yellow. When I first approached him with the two cartridge idea, Dan responded with what I called "management by stare." After an uncomfortable minute, I went away.

Our product development team went round and round about how to develop a product that met our needs with the four monocolored cartridges, but we couldn't see a path. So, I went back to Dan and said, "Explain to me why you can't develop a three-color print cartridge?"

Perhaps he'd been thinking about it, because this time he looked at me and said, "Sure, we can do that." That was it.

As a result of working on this project, I earned a patent for the "Thermal Inkjet Printhead Temperature Control," patent number 4,791,435. As a thermal inkjet cartridge prints, it heats up. As the ink heats, its viscosity, or thickness, decreases, which affects the speed and size of the ink droplet, and that affects the quality of the image. We saw ways we could offset this, and I came up with a simple idea we used. If we could keep track of the numbers of drops fired by the printer, and if too many drops are fired in a fixed amount of time, the printer could pause at the end of a row for a short time.

Now, it's true that most people could come up with the idea that if something gets too hot then let's turn down the heat. But because

I was there, I got a patent for it. In addition, because the team was creating the first ever color thermal inkjet printer, we faced numerous problems in search of solutions. Collectively, the team received over one hundred patents.

The PaintJet project went so well I was promoted to section manager responsible for the small format color inkjet printers. But it wasn't long before my friend and colleague, George Lynch, took the assignment of starting R&D in Barcelona. This was during a time when the European Union was putting pressure on U.S. companies to do more R&D and production in Europe. They had a series of carrots and sticks to use, like tax incentives and tariffs. The story that I heard was that HP had a choice of several countries in which they could set up operations. HP's president had cards made up with a country's name on them. Each division manager had to pick a card and our manager, Brian Moore, pulled out Spain.

George Lynch had been in charge of our large format pen plotters, by this time a dying product line. No one wanted the job. More or less as a joke, I said I'd take over if no one else would. In reality, that made no sense at all. My section was doing great and clearly had a great future. But next thing I knew, I was in charge of large format plotters. Happily, it turned out to be a good job. I worked closely with George because the plan was to transfer the pen plotters to Barcelona.

I hosted Spanish, more accurately Catalan, engineers in San Diego. George had the great idea to recruit Fulbright scholars from Spain who received engineering degrees in the U.S. He got some fantastic engineers, Josep Tarradas, Carles Castellsague, and Isidre Rosello. (I remained friends with all three. Unfortunately, Isidre lost a long battle with cancer and passed away in 2021.)

I made several trips to Barcelona and schemed about how I would live there. George and I talked about me taking over his job when he was done. That plan didn't work out because Rebecca was a senior in high school. She didn't want to go and Kay wouldn't go without her.

During this time, I made my biggest contribution to HP by starting the DesignJet product line. Our division had committed to inkjet. Meanwhile, though, I thought about ways to extend the pen plotter line. My first task as head of the large format plotter development was to assist in taking the plotter development to Barcelona. But I also was thinking about what was next, specifically how to bring inkjet technology to large format printing. For us, large format meant paper twenty-four inches wide, or wider. The original pen plotters were commonly used by architects and engineers. Buildings, mechanical parts, or schematics would be designed with CAD (Computer Aided Design) systems. The plotters would put the lines on paper, but inkjet would put images on the paper as well, which expanded its uses.

At the time, Majid Azmoon's section was developing a large format inkjet project called BOSUN. BOSUN was a loose acronym for "blot out the sun," which I thought was a bad image. To effectively bring something to market, I believed in keeping everything as simple as possible. Even worse, BOSUN used a printer cartridge that was being developed for BOSUN as well as for a small format printer called Triton, which was part of Phil Faraci's section. In other words, the cartridge development team was being yanked in different directions because the printer teams had different needs. As one example, BOSUN wanted a big print cartridge with a big ink capacity and a large throughput on special paper. Triton had to use plain paper and wanted a smaller form factor and more modest performance. I prodded management to pick the priority product and get it to market. The team working with the second priority product would have to do its best with what it got.

In my little domain, I came up with a product idea we called BOB, Black Only Bosun. We'd take a black print cartridge already in production for the OfficeJet printer, developed by the Vancouver, Washington, division, and put it on one of our large format pen products. I put together preliminary specs, a plan outline, and presented it to division management.

In the end, BOB and I went down in flames.

Disheartened, I went out for drinks with George Lynch. He described how to get to a positive project decision. First, identify the decision makers. In this case it was my boss, the lab manager, Al Johnson, and the product marketing manager Mick O'Rourke. Then, figure out their objectives. How do they make decisions? What information are they looking for? Over the next few weeks, I studied Al and Mick, met with them one on one, and then used what I'd learned to modify my product and presentation. As a result of the time I put in following George Lynch's advice, my project was soon accepted, which meant BOSUN was canceled and I got the resources that I needed for "Elvira, mistress of the dark."

All this occurred in late 1988 to early 1989, a time when women were entering the corporate world in greater numbers than ever before. This meant change was in the air, and HP was no exception. A few months before BOSUN was canceled, an ink chemist, Don Palmer, took a group of visiting Japanese engineers to the place of their choice, a strip club. A female engineer, who wasn't involved, complained to HR (Human Resources). I heard about it, one of the higher-ups talked to Don, and strip club excursions were off the list of tourist attractions. So, back to Elvira, I could imagine the merchandise already. Our product, like the movie character, the witchy Elvira, looked cheap and black. Oh, wait a minute. We heard our words. Oops, we changed the name to Felix, the black and white cat.

Around this time, I was working with the Barcelona engineers on their first product. Early on in the development process I'd explained that it was an HP custom to name a project. For really important decisions I used something called the "Persian decision-making method," which has been around a long time discussed in many business journals, including *Forbes*.

The method comes from Herodotus, the Greek father of history, who reported that the Persians would only decide to carry through on something if it looked good both sober and drunk. So, my implementation of this method started with getting all of the facts shared among the engineers. We'd all know the what, why, and some of the how of what we were about to do. This first part comes from the work of the left-brain hemisphere, where the logical stuff arises. Then we'd continue brainstorming at a bar.

Despite other myths about "altered states," alcohol doesn't enhance the brain's right hemisphere as much as it clobbers the left hemisphere and allows the right brain to work. So, we threw out ideas. I asked if there were any ferocious animals in Spain we might name it after. They said no, they'd killed them all! They had a native squirrel, but that was too ordinary. We needed something better. The animal conversation eventually gave way to talk of famous battles Spain had won. No go there. They lost all of the important battles. However, they did celebrate the National Day of Catalonia, when King Phillip of Spain defeated the Catalon army in 1714.

We continued on and needed a breakthrough, a spark of inspiration. I asked what the name for inspiration was in Catalan. The word was *xispa*. We had it. It was unanimous. We'd call HP Barcelona's first project Xispa. We wrote it down and the next day, sober once again, we reviewed it and it passed the test. Xispa it was.

THE ROAD TO PATENT #2

At some point I realized I was bored with managing large projects and felt the need for a change from HP. (As I eventually learned, I have a work attention span of two to three years.) I decided to go to work for a company called ASYMTEK, founded by three HP friends: Ciardella, Babiarz, and Maiorca, who used their experience with pen plotters to develop a sort of simple robotics. Their main business was dispensing fluid, particularly adhesives for mounting electronic chips on printed circuit boards. As a side note, one application was a crude 3D printer. They could dispense a waxy rope to build up a 3D object.

I was more or less the whole electrical engineering department, and much of my job involved supporting production and small design changes. Based on our collective knowledge of inkjet printing we had one particularly innovative project.

At the time, the fluid dispensers were pretty slow. The device would move the dispensing head to a spot, turn on a valve for a short time, turn off the valve and quickly rise to snap off the gooey thread. A common application of this was putting down small drops of glue that would stick integrated circuits to a PC board.

What if, instead of all of this start, stop, up, down, slow business, we could fly across the board and accurately spray out drops of glue? Our inspiration was the first Inkjet product that all of us had worked on at HP, Satyr. There was a nozzle, a chamber that was kept full of the adhesive, and a solenoid that would forcefully whack a piston that would drive out a little bit of glue. The project name for this was Sledgehammer, descriptive because when it was running, anyone nearby needed hearing protection. We made a prototype and the three principal developers, Don La, Carlos Bouras, and I were awarded a patent (Number: 5,711,989 Computer Controlled Method for Dispensing Viscous Fluid) for the first such device. So, although my second patent was for work done at ASYMTEK, I was recruited back to HP in 1993.

A NOTE ABOUT INVENTIONS AND PATENTS

Some misunderstandings exist about the usefulness of patents and the difficulty of creating them. From time to time, people approach me with an idea they want to patent, usually because they're sure it will make a lot of money. Unfortunately, this sort of thing seldom works out. The world is full of ideas. The more important part of putting new ideas into the world is to do the hard work of creating something useful that people want to use and pay for. The patent itself just gives the owner the right to sue someone who is using the idea without paying the owner of the patent for it. However, even if they violate your patent, it's difficult for an individual to take powerful corporations, Amazon, General Motors, or ExxonMobil, for example, to court and win.

In my experience, the best path is to first focus on building something unique. The patent can come later. As I mentioned, Satyr was the first project I worked on at HP. However, the first project I managed was the HP PaintJet, codenamed Squirt—obvious because of the squirt of ink. HP's code names for projects were meant to obfuscate what the product was if the name leaked to the public. But mostly it was to inform the t-shirt design. Our logo was a colorful drop of ink.

At the time HP was the leader in making pen plotters, although pen plotters had their limitations. Since you could only make the pen move so fast, it would clog and skip, and a good-looking image was out of the question. So, we looked at many technologies, electrophotographic, electrostatic, laser imaging on special paper, continuous inkjet and others. We eventually settled on thermal inkjet. It promised to be simple: Explosively heat several picoliters of ink over a resistor to drive it through a small hole onto the paper. Once HP Labs had the basic invention, we'd turn it into a product in two years. It actually took forty engineers around four years. The

August 1988 issue of the *HP Journal* was dedicated to the technology, and I wrote the section on product development. (HP Journal)

ANOTHER PATENT IN THE WORKS

My third patent was initiated during my time with HP in Barcelona. I was happily working away at ASYMTEK when Phil Faraci asked me if I wanted to go to Barcelona to manage the software development for the DesignJet family of large format printers. His first choice was my friend Emil Maghakian. Unfortunately for him, he was in a car accident during his Barcelona visit and although no one was hurt, his spouse thought the city was too dangerous to drive in.

Kay was excited by the opportunity, because by that time, both of our kids were in college and we were free to go. On our initial tour of Barcelona, we had dinner with Pam and Dennis Mudd, who would one day become key players in my life. At that time, however, their job was to tell us a bit about what it's like to be an expat.

During the first half of my time in Barcelona I managed what was called the "connectivity section." The connectivity part referred to the software drivers that make the printing happen when you press print. A lot goes into the driver. The documents we print start in many different formats, such as pdf, doc, screenshots, and more. Then the output can be on one or two sides, different sized paper, many types of paper (plain, vellum, Mylar, and more) color/ B&W, and many other settings.

Since we did large format printing, we experimented with ways to magnify images that were made for small printing sizes in order to make them look good printed in a large size. For example, if you want to double the size of an image, you can take each dot and replace it with four dots, but that makes for splotchy, "pixelated" images. Plus, what if you want to expand the image 3.7 times?

There were many techniques researched with names like error diffusion, random dither, ordered dither, just to name a few.

HP had a time-honored tradition of practical jokes. In 1994, we had a division review conducted by our group manager, Antonio Perez, a high-powered but pleasant fellow. He'd go on to lead other companies like Gemplus and Kodak. Carles Castellsague, a project manager in my group, was giving a presentation on our latest software to make small photos look good in sizes up to three feet by six feet. We walked through a doorway into a printing lab. We shut the door, but on the back of it was an image of me doing the flamenco! Antonio thought it was a pretty good prank on me and gave me some tips on my form.

The photo came from a trip a group of us took to a flamenco place in Barcelona. At some point, the dancers asked for volunteers. Someone gave me a push and the next thing I knew I was part of the entertainment. Unfortunately for me, Carles took a picture. Later, he told me the joke was payback for a prank I'd had a small part in pulling on him during his time in San Diego.

As I was developing the connectivity section, I recruited an engineer, Enrique Lores, who'd made a detour into marketing. However, I brought him back to R&D as a project manager. Enrique was an exceptionally bright, hardworking, and a guy who could get along great with most everyone. I first put him in a small group of two people I managed, and I talked to him now and then about how he could advance to division manager. Twenty years later, he was made CEO of HP!

After about a year of managing software I was asked to start a next generation DesignJet product development. Up until that point we were sharing printer cartridges with the smaller printers. The small printers were used primarily in homes and small businesses. I agreed with that strategy in the beginning, but as our business grew it was time to have our own cartridge. The

DesignJet line was primarily for technical customers like architects and engineers. We started looking at signage, like the kind seen in grocery stores, hung in aisles or walls, as well as floor signs. We also thought about printing on fabric to make custom clothing.

Two key things big printers (we called them large format printers) needed were a lot of nozzles for speed and a lot of ink. Up until that point, when the ink ran out the whole cartridge was thrown away, a big waste. The key innovation for this program was replaceable tanks of ink. I managed this for the first year before returning to San Diego. At that point, the program was taken over by Mike Puyot, a great engineer, manager, and golfer.

Big printers had specific kinds of challenges, including the need to print on many different types of media. This ranged from plain papers, glossy coated papers, vellum, Mylar and so on. To get the best quality a unique print mode was developed for each media type. Considerable work went into determining how many ink drops were deposited and in which order. Unfortunately, the printer didn’t know what media it was printing on unless it was told. The user could enter the media type on the printer front panel or on the computer’s printer driver. However, users often wouldn’t think of it, so they didn’t get the best quality.

As I worked on the project I thought of various solutions like having the printer do a spectral analysis of the paper. In the end, I used a system of barcodes. The printer’s carriage had a LED sensor to detect the paper’s edge and was good enough to read a barcode. The printer could handle single sheets but much of our printing was on long rolls. We could have the media manufacturer print a barcode on the leading edge of the paper. When a new roll was loaded onto the printer, it would read the barcode and tell the printer the media type and length. The carriage had a cutter, which would then cut off that little strip. When the roll was unloaded, the printer could print a new barcode with the media type and the length of the remaining roll.

I thought I'd come up with a pretty nifty idea so I wrote up a patent application and turned it in to our patent team. I forgot about it, but a couple of years later, when I was back in San Diego, another division's patent lawyer contacted me. For some reason the piece of my idea that was patented was cutting off a little strip of paper! How odd. But the good news was that at this time HP was offering $1,000 per patent, which I gladly accepted. It was the only time I made any money from a patent.

MORE CHANGES

Still with HP and back in San Diego, I was working on starting a company. The idea began with Dennis and Pam Mudd. I first met Dennis at HP in San Diego in the 1980s, but I became good friends with both Dennis and Pam in Barcelona in the 1990s. He was in charge of product marketing and we worked together on defining features for new products. He and Pam threw great parties.

At some point both suggested we start a company. Although interested, I thought back to ASYMTEK, the company started by three engineers who, in my opinion, struggled because they were too much alike. However, Pam, Dennis, and I had very different talents, so I checked that box.

We also had to decide what business we should launch. "They," meaning experts, I suppose, usually say we should start a company that relates to our strengths. Really? Well, our connection was drinking and parties, so why not a bar? Barcelona had a yuppie techie bar with monitors showing the price of drinks. I thought it was great. As people bought a lot of one type of drink, the prices would go up. Every once in a while the prices would crash. But when the drinks were cheap people rushed to the bar. I suggested putting our bar in a financial district and call it Wall Street. We eventually vetoed the bar idea and decided it had to be more techie.

Dennis also had an idea for large format printing software. We'd be the perfect people to develop it, but it seemed too boring. Still, Dennis put together a plan and pitched it, but that didn't work out.

After batting around more ideas, I then suggested we look to the internet. In 1995 I looked at a graph of internet usage and saw the exponential growth. I suggested doing something with music. Specifically, I thought we could get the one million most popular songs on a server. Users could search, select, and pay a dollar per song. At the time, downloading a song was a slow process, because most consumers were using dial up modems, just fast enough for text-based email. At the time, AOL was a popular email server.

I suggested that we create a CD with customers' choice of music and ship it to the user in a day. I did some quick calculations and was amazed at how easily we could store a million songs. I didn't think that getting the songs would be a problem. However, as it turned out, it wasn't until April 2003 when Apple would finally get a license to sell songs for a dollar over the internet. The record labels made most of their profits from selling albums and were afraid of the internet.

Dennis couldn't stand the idea of waiting a day for a CD. He wanted to figure out what we could provide a customer right away. We thought about the CDs people already own, along with LP records and DATs (Digital Audio Tapes) many people also owned. We had a challenge to put together playlists because the music could be scattered all over the place. Eventually we came to the idea of organizing their music.

By this time, I'd moved back to HP San Diego from Barcelona, and Dennis took a job in marketing at the HP facility in Vancouver, Washington. I searched the internet with a pre-Google search engine like Alta Vista. I found software written by Canadian, Jim Mclaughlin, to rip the CD. Ripping is the term for creating a digital music file, commonly mp3, from a music CD. I used a software development system called Visual Basic and audio processing software from Real Audio.

I was doing this work before mp3 was popular. I wrote a simple prototype program to get the music off of a CD and play it. I also found a CD from the 10,000 Maniacs called “Our Time in Eden.” From that CD, I ripped the song, “These are the Days.” On my next trip to visit Pam and Dennis in Camas, Washington, I gave a demo. They liked it and we proceeded to form a company. I think of Musicmatch whenever I hear that song.

Pam was the glue that held Musicmatch together. She had an accounting background and also took care of legal issues, customer support, and many other things. Dennis had a marketing background and had also raised money. As our CEO he formed partnerships with many companies we needed to work with in order to be successful.

We had the idea for the company in 1996 and founded Musicmatch in 1997. Just before the dot com bubble burst in March of 2000, the company was appraised at over $500 million. Then iTunes for Mac came out in 2001. Musicmatch was distributed by Apple for Windows PCs before they had iTunes for Windows. If I’d known that by 2001 our biggest competitors would be Microsoft with Windows Media Player and Apple iTunes, I’d say we were crazy to start. Sometimes knowing too much can be your downfall. We finally sold the company to Yahoo! in 2004, right before Emma, my second daughter, was born.

THE PERSONAL SIDE

The previous years had been pivotal personally as well as professionally—more about that later. Kay and I had divorced and I had the opportunity to have another family with my second wife, Jane Lea. Emma was my third child and second daughter.

MUSIC MATCH
Take control of your music
iomega

First Musicmatch team picture taken about 1998. Jim, Randy Camp (holding Brandon), Dennis Mudd, Terry Yuen, Alejandro Borgia, and Phil Pellouchoud.

At the time, the term "self-actualization" was popular, and in a way it's descriptive of what I did for a couple of years after Emma's birth. I explored things I hadn't had the time or the will to do earlier in my life. Because I had achieved a certain level of success, I was able to spend my time enjoying being the dad of an infant. By this time in my life, I knew more about being both a partner and a parent.

During these years, I also explored some other areas by taking art and music classes at the local community college. I enjoyed myself, although I wasn't very good at these things. That didn't matter because Emma was my main project. And a project it was! I read books like *The Scientist in the Crib*, by Alison Gopnik, Andrew Meltzoff, and Patricia Kuhl (HarperCollins ebook reprint, 2009), which argues that infants are like little scientists, constantly experimenting. I also played Baby Mozart while she slept to fine tune her growing synapses. This "baby Mozart" trend included other classical music that was part of the fad at the time and promoted through CDs, DVDs, and books. When Emma was old enough to eat solid foods, I experimented with many different items. It was something to watch her slurp down a herring or sardine!

Emma and Jim playing the piano.

When Emma was eight months old, Jane Lea went back to work and we hired a nanny, Wendy, a woman from Honduras. She was terrific all around, and a great teacher to Emma, and we liked that our baby was exposed to Spanish. When we heard Emma counting to ten in Spanish, we asked her to count to ten in English and were surprised when she could do that so early in her toddlerhood.

Around this time, I went through another professional change. In 2006, a venture capital firm contacted Dennis Mudd about starting a music satellite business and he then contacted me. It seemed that an electrical engineer in Austin, Texas, Celite Milbrandt, had an idea for leasing transponders on satellites in geosynchronous orbit over the United States. I traveled to Austin to meet with Celite and representatives from both Austin Ventures and Sevin Rosen, both of which were venture capital firms interested in backing Celite's idea.

To be honest, the idea seemed a bit far-fetched. But my spirit of "how bad could it be?" took over. If I worked on this project, I'd get a small percentage of the company, but it also meant giving up my art and music classes. The venture capitalists would initially invest $15 million to get started. Over the next year we had a basic system up and working.

With a large satellite dish in Austin, we could send music up to a satellite transponder. The satellite sent the music down to a small receiver that could be placed on a car similar to the ones that Sirius and XM used. We had millions of songs from our Musicmatch days, so every day we'd send thousands of songs into space and onto receivers in cars. Each car would have our software, which would sift through all of the music and save in the car only the music that was of interest to the user. We called this personalization. So, although there was only one "channel" sending out music, in the car it would appear as multiple channels, such as classic rock, Norwegian death metal, Folktronica, whatever. Based on the interactions with our website we could do a good job of selecting music users would enjoy.

The problem with the idea came about because the technology didn't deliver and was too expensive. Initially the plan was to have only one transponder. But to cover the whole US we needed four, and it wasn't good that the cost was $50,000 per transponder per month. On top of that, the bandwidth kept dropping, which meant the number of songs per day we could deliver kept dropping. The death blow was that the receiver was too expensive.

After a lot of arm twisting, Celite finally produced a parts list that we gave to a Taiwanese contract manufacturer with whom our COO, Jim Cady, had a relationship. Jim was a super friendly, bright fellow who'd president of Diamond Multimedia, the company that produced one of the first mp3 players. The contract manufacturer said that the parts would cost $500! This was way too much, since it had to sit on every car. Twenty bucks would be more like it. Around this time, Celite and the whole Austin satellite part of our business were terminated.

While this was going on our San Diego team had amassed millions of songs on our servers. I had one engineer, Daniel Baird, developing a web interface for our music. It was roughly based on Musicmatch Radio, which we had produced back in 2003. In 2007, our board of directors questioned why I was spending time on this. Our business model showed that all of our revenue would come from the satellite business. I told them that I wasn't sure when that business would take off, but we could deliver music to millions of users almost immediately.

In around 2006, Pandora (a subscription music streaming service) was just starting to ramp up. In my mind we had a superior solution, but we held back our internet music streaming service because our money was supposed to come from hardware. Then, in 2007 we first introduced the Slacker music service.

During this time Apple's iPod was the "cool" player. People would laboriously create playlists to download to their player. After some weeks they'd get bored with their playlists and hit "shuffle-play all." The number one feature request for an iPod was a radio.

We had surveys of iPod users who wanted a radio built in. They got tired of creating playlists and re-listening to just their music. It got stale, but our millions of songs at Slacker could keep their listening fresher. Slacker promised to make music management as easy as radio but personalized to each user. We'd say: "Do you want to be a DJ and work hard to craft a playlist, or a Slacker and sit back and enjoy music?"

Unfortunately, when the satellite portion of the business was stopped, we didn't put all of our energy into the web music player. Pandora would become a one-billion-dollar company by focusing on web streaming. Instead, because of our board, and folks from Diamond Multimedia like Cady and Jonathan Sasse, we focused on creating a portable music player. Cady and Sasse claimed it would be easy to hit our goal of selling two hundred thousand players. "We could sell that many out of the back of a pickup truck." Or such was the claim. Cady and Sasse are both great guys, but this was bad timing.

I preferred making a very simple hardware player. A user could create their stations on the web and the player would simply download the stations and play. The player would be so cheap we could give it away with a two-year subscription to our service. The music player that Dennis and the others in marketing wanted was overly complicated. For example, users were supposed to be able to do sophisticated tasks like create their own playlist on the device. I hired firmware and hardware teams and even set up an engineering group in Shenzhen, China. The complexity of the project and our relative lack of experience made the project drag on into early 2008. Our player won Laptop Magazine's Best of CES Portable Audio player award. However, in July 2008, Apple introduced the iPhone app store. All of a sudden mp3 players became obsolete. In 2009, we had to sell the existing Slacker music players at fire sale prices.

So, by 2010, we'd burned through around $50 million. Our satellite and then mp3 player business struck out. We were left with Slacker streaming radio, which was very similar to our Musicmatch radio of 2003. Pandora had raced ahead of us and we were a distant and fading second place. We recapitalized the company, which raised money, but it also made my share of the company essentially zero. It was at this time I retired for the second time and started another chapter, a year in Provence.

There's nothing more dangerous than a resourceful idiot.
— Scott Adams (Dilbert)

CHAPTER 8

NEW BEGINNINGS AND BIG CHANGES

Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end.
— Seneca

When Kay and I moved to San Diego with our two kids, we were doing more than simply relocating. We were essentially changing the direction of our lives, and our focus. The move culminated after my years at UW Madison, where I took classes every summer so I could finish college in three years. I never went through a graduation ceremony because I didn't get all of my credits until August 1978. Then, that same month, Kay and I loaded up our 1974 Pinto Wagon and drove to San Diego. (The Pinto sedan, not the wagon, was widely known as a car whose gas station would explode if hit from the rear. Here's a link to a Pinto exploding scene from the movie, Top Secret! https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-9GGDOUDLhc.)

On a "preview trip" we located an apartment complex on Midland Road in Poway. It was a small three-bedroom apartment, but the complex had a pool and tennis courts, which we all enjoyed. For the four months that we lived there I played the most tennis that I'd ever played.

Houses seemed too expensive for me to consider with my $18,000 a year salary, so I called up a real estate agent with the idea of buying a mobile home. The agent said that we could do better than that, so we started looking for a house. We concentrated on Escondido, less than ten miles from work and quite a bit cheaper than anything closer. Eventually, we settled on a small three-bedroom house on Goldenrod Street in Escondido. The price was $67,000, but I only qualified for a $60,000 FHA (Federal Housing Authority) loan. At the time, it was common practice for the realtor to ask the seller to provide a discreet second mortgage between what the buyer could afford and the sales price. So that is how I was able to buy my first home.

For the first time I had homeowners insurance. The insurance agent first suggested a policy, but mentioned in passing that it didn't include flood insurance. It seemed odd to worry about flood insurance in what looked to be a desert. Looks can be deceiving. The next winter we had a big rainstorm that caused standing water in our small backyard and sent six inches of water running down the street. I read reports of motorists ignoring road closures, going around small barricades and drowning in their cars. Okay, so maybe the insurance agent was right to consider flood insurance.

SUMMER AT STANFORD–AND THE FIRST CRACKS APPEAR

As a person starting out in my new professional life, I worked almost all of the time. One Saturday in 1979, I took Jimmy to my office. He was around age six by this time. Computer games were quite crude at the time, but like me, Jimmy liked them. While I worked on a computer program on an HP desktop calculator, I set Jimmy up to play a game on an HP computer terminal.

At some point, I left Jimmy alone while I went to the computer room for something. Unfortunately, my program was stored on a digital tape that was the same size as the digital tape that Jimmy used to play his game. While I was out, he grabbed my tape, plugged it into his computer, and somehow hit the record button, which made my program unreadable! All of my programming work for the last three months was inaccessible–and without a backup. I spent the next two workdays doing some arcane programming in the innards of the desktop calculator and eventually was able to recover most of my work. This serves as a reminder today as much as it did then–*back up your work.*

Because working all of the time wasn’t enough for me, I applied for what HP called a fellowship at Stanford and was accepted. For the next two years, I worked on my master’s degree on nights and weekends. HP had a deal with Stanford that allowed us to take classes that were recorded in Stanford’s TV classrooms. A tape would be sent to us in San Diego. Whoever had signed up for the class would watch it along with an HP mentor, an engineer who was an expert in the field that we were studying. We didn’t have the advantage of asking questions of the instructor, but we could stop the class at any time and discuss any questions with the mentor.

Time off to spend a quarter on campus at Stanford was included in the fellowship I chose the summer of 1980. I had applied for housing in the graduate dorm, Crothers Hall, but was placed in Wilbur Hall which worked out great.

Problems in our marriage started to appear during this time. Kay and I decided to have a camping trip on the way up to Stanford to drop me off. As I recall, we visited Sequoia and Yosemite national parks. The day before arriving at Stanford we got into an argument over something trivial, and I was unreasonably angry. I said something like, “We disagree so much we should get a divorce.”

This was an extreme overreaction, but this is where we left things when I was dropped off at Stanford. Normally, my responses to conflict are pretty measured. Coworkers often marveled at how calm I could be when problems with projects came up. At the end of the first project that I managed, the HP PaintJet, a cartoonist/engineer that worked on my team presented me with a cartoon with the caption, “What, me worry?” I was standing in front of a printer, like what we had developed, while it was exploding behind me. I wish I still had that cartoon. But sometimes, only in family situations, I’d overreact.

Years later I found that my vitamin D level is low. Jane Lea, Emma, and I were living in Elmhurst, Illinois, for Jane Lea’s usability research job with User Centric. Emma’s pediatrician suggested that she take vitamin D because it’s common to be low, especially in the upper Midwest. We determined her dosage and I thought, what the heck, I’ll take some too. After a few weeks, I noticed that my mood had noticeably improved. Often in the winter, I would experience something like Season Affective Disorder (SAD). However, Jane Lea and I both noticed that I was better.

As an aside, I’ve always found it interesting that Jane Lea changed her career from teaching to research work in what is known as “usability.” Wikipedia defines it this way: "Usability can be described as the capacity of a system to provide a condition for its users to perform the tasks safely, effectively, and efficiently while enjoying the experience." Her career change led to a job at a good consulting firm.

After my experience with SAD and vitamin D, I studied the effects of low vitamin D and found that depression was one of them. At my next doctor’s appointment, I had my vitamin D level checked. I was taking 2,000 IUs of vitamin D per day and my vitamin D level was 30 ng/ml, which was on the lowest end of the normal level. As an experiment, I doubled my vitamin D intake to 4,000 IUs per day. At my next test, my blood level was 60 ng/ml. So, if I wasn't taking any vitamin D, I assume that I'd be very low. In any case, Jane Lea doesn't want me to stop taking this vitamin.

That is a long detour to suggest a cause for my irrational reaction. But at the time Kay dropped me off at Stanford, we were angry with each other. Over the next few weeks everything seemed to go back to normal, but as with an earthquake, we can be left with unseen cracks below the surface.

Overall, I had a great time at Stanford. My course load was reasonable. I had only one class that was very hard, "Introduction to Nonlinear Control Systems," although don't be fooled by "introduction" in the title. The class was taught by a Korean fellow, whose accented English was very hard to understand. Some of the math relied on linear algebra, which I'd studied four years before in Madison. I thought I'd never forget how to solve for eigenvectors, but here I was. I had to go to the library for a refresher. One of my classmates was from Yugoslavia and working on his Ph.D. in control systems. (Probably so that the Soviets could better shoot down our planes–we were still living in that era.) He was a great guy and helped me a lot in getting through the problem sets and the class.

One of my most useful classes was a physical education class called conditioning. Since basic training, I hadn't paid much attention to my fitness. This class got me out and pushed me to a new level, which I've kept for decades afterward.

This was my only college dorm experience and I had a lot of fun. I made several friends, one of which, John Holmes, I've stayed in contact with for forty years. He was into music and we went to concerts in San Francisco, like Squeeze and the Psychedelic Furs. He introduced me to ultimate frisbee and we played on the field just outside of Wilbur Hall with whoever showed.

So, while I had a good time, Kay had less fun back in Escondido taking care of Jimmy, age eight and Rebecca now age six. I went home at the end of the summer and resumed work like nothing had happened. One day in the fall of 1980, I came home from work to find the house was empty and a note from Kay. I can’t remember the details but she was unhappy and had taken the kids to Phoenix to stay for a week with her sister Sue. She wanted me gone when she came back.

Well, this rocked my world. I’d taken my family for granted and now I was shocked that they were gone. I moved into a studio behind my friend Dewey’s garage in Leucadia. He taught me bachelor's survival skills like how to make a peanut butter and honey sandwich.

After a few months, I was starting to feel better about the single life, right about the time that Kay said that she wanted to give our marriage another chance. I went back home and we spent many sessions with a counselor and things seemed to go pretty well for several years. We dealt with issues that many couples contend with, such as the way money is handled and spending decisions made. Overall, I’d have to say that I learned to share control of our finances and become more flexible and attentive, and less critical and “grumbly.”

MOVING FORWARD AT HP

Work went well for me. I was promoted to project leader, project manager, and finally section manager in 1988. In 1987 we introduced the first project that I managed, the HP PaintJet, the first color inkjet printer by HP.

Because my salary had gone up, Kay and I started thinking about changing houses. One day we went for a drive through the Coronado Hills south of San Marcos, CA. We drove down the road Solo Roble and the Pacific ocean from the Carlsbad power plant to the southern edge of Los Angeles. The first vacant lot down the road had a for sale sign. Two acres of coastal sage scrub for $45,000 with a wide ocean view. What a deal. Over the next two years we worked with local designer/builder, Dan Eubanks, to build the house.

When we moved in, Jimmy started ninth grade at San Marcos High School and Rebecca started seventh grade at San Marcos Junior High. I didn't count on how our remote location would work with the kids. Houses in our area were a quarter mile apart. A bus came by to take kids to school but play dates or any other extracurricular activities were a challenge. I loved the house and location but if I had it to do over again, I'd wait to build it until at least one of our kids could drive.

Jimmy's high school years were a challenge for me. It seemed like everything he did made me angry. For one thing, he was more interested in surfing than school. One of the conditions for him to drive was maintaining a B grade average. In the first grade report of his junior year, he had a C average so he couldn't drive. He came up with the idea of getting weekly progress reports from his instructors. After a week he had a B average and could drive again. Next report card: C average and no driving for a week. By the end of the year, we realized he was forging just enough weekly progress reports to get a B average. I was furious, so for the summer before his senior year, he couldn't use the car.

In his senior year he was absent a quarter of the time but kept a B average. I don't know how he did it or how we let it happen, but his classes were like English as a second language and basket weaving. After high school it looked like he was going to spend an excessive amount of time on our couch, so Kay and I agreed that he had to move out. His grades and classes were so meager that he only signed up for community college, Palomar College in San Marcos near where we lived. I told him that he'd have to pay all of the expenses but that if he got a B average I'd pay him back.

I use Jimmy as a positive example for parents who are worried about their derelict kids. He spent four years at community college to make up for what he missed in high school, transferred to Berkeley, graduated with honors, became an MD and professor at UC San Francisco, and is currently Chief Medical Officer of a male fertility startup company called Fellow. We get along great now. So, there's always hope!

Jimmy, Tyler, Madeline, and Amy Smith at Jimmy's UCSF medical school graduation.

Rebecca was very different. She worked hard and kept out of the simmering battle between Jimmy and me. She was a good student but didn't like it when I tried to help with math homework. As much as I would like to be a good teacher to my kids, I wasn't. I would, unfortunately, express exasperation and it wasn't fun, especially for Rebecca.

When it was time to choose a college, she applied to many, especially those far away from home. My deal with the kids was that I'd pay for books and tuition for whatever California public school they got into. If they wanted to go out of state, or to a private college, they'd have to get scholarships and loans to make up the difference. California has good public colleges and those were the ones they applied to. Rebecca went to UC Santa Barbara starting in the fall of 1992.

Besides school expenses, the kids were given a modest and insufficient amount of money to live on. I thought that if they worked fifteen hours a week they could survive. Kay and I had managed to get by with no support from anyone except the government and that molded my philosophy.

Jimmy worked as a waiter and made good money, but Rebecca worked at a copy shop for minimum wage in Santa Barbara and ran into money problems. After two years at Santa Barbara, she came back to live with me while she got her finances under control before finishing at UC San Diego as a communications major.

In 1990, I left HP for the first time to work for ASYMTEK. In 1993, when both the kids were off to college, HP friend, Phil Faraci, asked if I wanted to work for HP again, but in Barcelona. Kay and I were both excited to go. HP provided a lot of support including a two-day course in Chicago for Kay and me to learn how to avoid the pitfalls of an assignment in another country. I didn't pay attention to it and we suffered for it.

When I got to HP Barcelona, located just outside of the town of San Cugat, I felt myself to be a company man. I'd started the large format inkjet printing development at HP San Diego and now it was all moving to Barcelona. Over the next two years we would triple the size of the Barcelona operation. There was a lot of work to be done. I’ve heard people talk about the Spanish siesta. Maybe that happens somewhere in Spain but not among the engineers I worked with. They’d start a little late, perhaps 9 a.m., but it wasn’t uncommon for work to continue until seven or eight in the evening. I remember signing up for a regular squash scrimmage at 7 p.m. on Wednesdays so that it would get me out of work “early.”

I believed it was important to develop the local engineers. One of the ways was to require the meetings that I attended to be in English. I learned Spanish, but it was more important for the local folks to be proficient in English than for me to perfect my Spanish. As a side note, the preferred language of the team was Catalan, the local language. So, I worked a lot and spent considerable spare time with my friends Pam and Dennis Mudd, along with a group of British ex-patriots–expats.

Kay, on the other hand, didn’t have such a good time. She studied Spanish but had trouble becoming fluent. She was by herself a lot and didn’t have what she considered meaning in her life, or something to focus on.

Kay also missed the kids, which I didn’t understand, since they weren’t living at home, anyway. Besides, HP would fly the kids over to visit with us twice a year and we went back to the states for vacation once a year. In some ways we spent more time with the kids than if we’d been in San Diego. Communication with the kids wasn’t great, because international phone calls were expensive, the internet was new, and Skype, one of the first internet communication apps, didn’t arrive until 2003.

I didn’t realize how miserable she was until the first summer, 1994, when she went back to the states for a visit. After she left I got a letter saying that she didn’t like Spain, or me, and she wanted a divorce. This made me feel sad, confused, angry, and desperate to work things out. I flew back to San Diego and after a time, things calmed down, we more or less patched things up and she came back to Barcelona.

The summer of 1995 was a repeat of 1994, but this time, maybe it was strike three. I was done. If she wanted a divorce then so did I. We started making plans to live separately. I told my bosses that it was time for me to repatriate back to the US. The original plan was for me to stay in Spain for three years but with my marriage in turmoil, no one questioned my early return. I considered returning to Ft. Collins or Greeley, Colorado, or Boise, Idaho, but chose to return to San Diego. Working on my marriage was a significant factor in deciding to return to San Diego.

Viomesh Joshi offered me the position to lead HP's new digital camera development. However, the job would mean flying between the Netherlands, where the sensor would be made, and China where it would be manufactured. During my time in Spain, I flew across the Atlantic about every six weeks. I told VJ that despite how cool the offer was, it was too much travel and I didn't want it.

Somehow Kay and I patched things up enough for her to come back to Spain for my last few months. But from then until our eventual divorce in 1999, our relationship was rocky. As anyone who has been married and in love for years, breaking up is awful. Kay is a great person, but we married days after she finished high school and we grew into different people.

While in Spain I'd speak with Rebecca almost weekly. With growing urgency, too, because she was finishing her sophomore year at UC Santa Barbara. During one week's call, I asked what her major was going to be. Sociology, she said. I had no idea what that was, so I asked her to go to the college placement center and research what a sociologist did that matched what she wanted to do. The next week she'd decided to become a communications major and named some things she'd like to do with that kind of career. Great.

Jimmy had finished his four years of community college (which for people who worked hard in high school would take two years) in 1994 while we were in Spain. He was good at optimizing what he wanted to. My college payment deal was that I'd pay for five years. Since it was going to take him six years to get his bachelor's degree, he didn't take payment for his last year at community college. It made sense, because his years at Berkeley would cost a lot more. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in 1996 in molecular biology with honors. He applied to medical school but didn't get into the one that he wanted. He followed his wife, Amy, to Boston where she started a physical therapy program at the University of Boston. For a year he worked in a cancer research lab at Brigham and Women's hospital while he reapplied to medical schools. He was accepted into the Berkeley and UC San Francisco joint medical program where he got a master's degree from Berkeley and his MD from UCSF in 2002.

SEPARATION AND DIVORCE

We returned to the San Diego area in 1995. After living in smaller spaces in Spain, I thought it would be good to downsize, so we kept renting out our big house in San Marcos and bought a condo on the edge of Escondido.

Kay and I decided to separate not long after returning to San Diego. Kay moved into our house on Solo Roble Street and I stayed in the condo on Windyridge Glen in Escondido. We also met with a marriage counselor on and off, and for a time in 1997 we lived together in our San Marcos house. In the end we were just too different.

Getting married so young is a special kind of challenge. As a young couple grows up, it's a challenge to grow together. Towards the end of our marriage the kids kept us together. When they were out of the house, the last thread connecting us snapped.

The decision to divorce was torture for me. I spent days and months wondering what was wrong with me. Kay was a wonderful person. Why couldn't I convince myself that I still loved her and could be happy with her? We finally got divorced in 1998, a difficult time, but the right thing.

MARRYING AGAIN

In the summer of 1999, I was invited to a cookout at the home of Rob Kerner and Greta Paa-Kerner. I met Greta at HP while I was working in Barcelona and she was in the HP San Diego marketing department supporting the large format printers I was developing. Greta was a fun, energetic fireball and we had a great time together. Her husband Rob was a former Navy jet fighter pilot and an all-around great guy. What I didn't know until a bit later was that Jane Lea and Greta were roommates in college at UCSD.

At the time of the cookout, I was dating someone but she wasn't with me that day. Jane Lea and I chatted for quite some time. Rob's sister Holly was there as well, and we all ended up talking about what we were looking for in a mate. I mentioned that I'd only date women older than thirty. I was forty-five at the time, and Jane Lea was twenty-nine, but that didn't matter, since I wasn't thinking of dating her.

After the party, our mutual friend Greta told us separately that she thought we'd be a great couple. I told Greta thanks, but I was in another relationship. If not for Greta, I might not have thought of dating Jane Lea.

After the relationship I was in ran its course, I thought of Jane Lea and asked her out. Jane Lea lived in a little bungalow on Upas Street near the San Diego Zoo. We had dinner at the nearby Park House Eatery and had a great conversation.

Our first date led to regular dates. She was smart, interesting, and a calm empathetic personality. After a couple of months, I started to get cold feet. For one thing, she was interested in having children, but I was pretty sure that I was done with having kids. For another, she reminded me so much of Kay. For one thing, they had vaguely similar appearances, at least through my eyes, and both taught school and were musical. At the time Jane Lea was a special education teacher and backup singer in a rock band.

Given these things, we took a break, but continued to stay in touch. I helped her with computer problems, and she called me after one of her coworkers was murdered while in Mexico. We met for lunch and she told me about a good friend of hers who planned to have kids, but after she married her husband, he decided not to have children. I took that as a sign that she had some flexibility on the kid front.

As an aside, it also occurred to me that I'd been married for twenty-five years to someone not entirely dissimilar to Jane Lea. If I got another twenty-five years out of a relationship, I figured I'd be about dead, so what the hell. As I write this we've been married for over twenty-three years and I'm in better shape than I thought I'd be.

On St Patrick's Day in 2000, we started dating again. At this time, I was living in my Solo Roble house near San Marcos with a roommate, Bill Richards. Bill was a jack of all trades and programmer at Musicmatch. He was an idol in a way. He dropped out of college in Colorado and made his way to Alaska to keep bees, make beer, and work as a chef. At some point he taught himself programming and moved to Portland Oregon. He was part of a team that we hired and moved to San Diego. He needed a place to live and I had a big empty house.

Bill was a lot of fun and really knew how to throw a party. In the late summer of 2000, Bill, along with a bunch of Musicmatch friends, went to a party at another Musicmatch's friend on a lake near Pasos Robles. I didn't go for some reason. As a boat load of partiers were pulling up to an island with a keg of beer, Bill along with my partner's son jumped off the back of the boat to swim to shore. Before long, people on the shore noticed that Bill was struggling, then went under the water. At least one of the searchers had been a lifeguard but Bill wasn't to be found.

Divers were called in and Bill's body was recovered. A cause of death was never determined. We'd all been to Mexico a few weeks before and Bill was taking antibiotics. Maybe that contributed to stomach cramps but no one knows. I felt terrible. Even if it isn't logical, one can feel guilty. I thought that if I had just gone, I would have jumped off of the boat with Bill and been able to save him.

I decided to sell the Solo Roble house. My divorce had taken place there, and now my roommate had passed away. I looked for houses down in San Diego closer to where Jane Lea lived. We looked for places together and found a cute house on Adams Avenue in the Kensington area of San Diego. This house was built around 1927 in a Spanish style made popular after the Panama California Exposition. I eventually did historical research on the house and it was accepted as an historical home of San Diego. I enjoyed being in a neighborhood where I could walk to shops and dinner. Now we were close to Jane Lea's work teaching at Excelsior Academy, but about a two-hour bike ride to my work. Needless to say, I usually drove.

TALMADGE PARK
San Diego California
Jan. 18. 1927
Tunnell. Photo.
521 A St.

The first house Jane Lea and I bought together. A wonderful historic house.

We bought the house from a pack rat. He said he'd had two 'garage' sales but the house, the garage, the driveway and the backyard were all packed with things. As part of our purchase, the house had to be empty but we allowed him to leave some things in the backyard. On moving day, it was getting late in the evening when we finally got him out of the house and it wasn't entirely empty then. Later that same evening he came back and asked if I'd seen a nickel-plated handgun. I assured him that I hadn't but asked what he needed a gun for. He said something about the people that he did business with, adding that he would take the money from the house sale and move to Costa Rica. If any people in suits asked about him, we weren't to tell them anything. But if gangsters came, we could let them know. Fortunately, nothing came of that.

GETTING MARRIED IN FRANCE

While I was at Musicmatch I was offered a job to work for Gemplus near Marseilles France. The last time I had a job assignment overseas in Barcelona with Kay, it was a relationship disaster. So, with Jane Lea I had a checklist:

1. How's your French? She'd studied French for eight years in high school and college. Check
2. Would Jane Lea miss her children? No kids. Check
3. What would she do to stay occupied? She said that if nothing else, she'd tutor special education students. Check
4. For myself, I worked too much for HP Spain. I was resolved to enjoy France and Jane Lea. Final check.

Jane Lea and Jim Smith signing official wedding documents at the French city hall the week before our church wedding.

On my job preview trip to France with Jane Lea, I'd schemed to propose. Before the trip I spoke with her dad, Kent Shreeve, who was supportive. I picked out a ring. Phil Faraci made a reservation for me at a nice restaurant on the beach in Marseilles. The one thing I didn't count on was a ferocious wind called the Mistral. The locals call it "a wind strong enough to blow the ears off a donkey." So, there I am on the beach at sunset with Jane Lea and a cold gale. I proposed. In my version she says, "Yes, if we can go inside where it's warm."

When Jane Lea and I decided to get married, we chose to plan a small wedding with parents, siblings, my kids, and a few close friends. I'd already been married before and Jane Lea liked small weddings. In the summer of 2001, I was offered a job to lead a research and development group for Gemplus, a telecommunications company, near Aix-en-Provence, France. At the time, Jane Lea was up for living in Provence for a couple of years. Southern France is a great place to visit and would be convenient for us. It would also keep the size of the wedding manageable. So, in July of 2001, we set a date, October 6, 2001, and sent out invitations. How hard could it be to arrange everything in three months?

In France, the only legal part of getting married takes place in a town hall or *la mairie*. A typical French wedding group starts at the town hall to sign the papers, and then the wedding party walks across the street to the cathedral for a fine Catholic wedding.

For several reasons, the wedding turned out to be much harder to pull off than I thought. First, August was one of the three months we had to arrange it, and in many European countries, not much happens in the traditional holiday time of August. There went one month.

In addition, we weren't Catholic, so marrying in the traditional church was out. We did find a small Protestant church that had an English service once a week led by a former Marine chaplain who agreed to marry us.

I'd been married before and France expects certain paperwork, namely a guarantee from the US government, with an official stamp, certifying that I was divorced and there were no claims against me. Somehow, Jane Lea convinced an administrator at the

Vista California courthouse to write and stamp something to that effect. Plus, everything that was originally in English had to be translated to French by a qualified French translator.

We had to do all the regular things like finding a reception hall, music, and a cake. I wanted a carrot cake. Jane Lea was practically thrown out of a couple of French bakeries for asking for a cake made out of carrots. The traditional French wedding pastry was a Piece Montee, which is a bunch of small pastry balls piled up into a cone shape. What we got was a white cake with a fruit filling and roman candle fireworks attached. We assumed that the fireworks were a French addition and the bakery thought that Americans would want it. There were lots of cross-cultural misunderstandings.

We encountered a final obstacle. The church ceremony was on October 6, 2001, less than a month after 9-11. My son and my sister Sue were too worried about flight safety to attend. In the end we were officially married at city hall the week before the church wedding. Then, on October 6, we had a ceremony at the Protestant church followed by a reception at a wonderful mansion and courtyard tucked behind large plain doors on a small side street in Aix-en-Provence. As far as I know, a great time was had by all.

Jane Lea and Jim Smith.

Cindy Vrazsity, Rebecca Smith, Jane Lea Shreeve Smith, Jim Smith, Carolyn Smith, Susie Smith, and Ray Smith at our wedding in Aix en Provence France.

Jane Lea, the special education teacher, explaining the tricky table rotation at our wedding reception.

You can't go back and change the beginning, but you can start where you are and change the ending.
— C.S. Lewis

CHAPTER 9

FUN AND GAMES 1

> We don't stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing.
>
> — George Bernard Shaw

I titled these next chapters "Fun and Games 1, 2, and 3," because when I look back on where I started life and compare it with the things I've done and the places I visited, it even astounds me. What's more, sports and travel were frequently linked. A cycling trip in Vietnam was obviously more than a way to push myself physically. Playing soccer in Barcelona was part of my expat life. On the other hand, given my background, being challenged by any number of physical pursuits isn't surprising.

Road trips in the U.S. and foreign travel is something I shared with a certain percentage of my peers who also were part of the growing middle class in the years after World War II. We were the first generation for whom overseas travel became accessible and not simply a pipe dream. In fact, the idea of flying to Europe, for example, doesn't seem particularly exotic today. That said, only a modest percentage of Americans travel abroad, but it's enough to make travel-leisure a huge sector in our economy.

Like many people growing up in the 1950s, my family traveled locally, always by car and for particular reasons. Once a month or so, we'd visit an aunt and uncle in the big city of Rockford, Illinois. Aunt Grace was my mother's aunt and she and Uncle Tweety didn't have kids, so my siblings and I were their surrogate kids. We had great food at their house, including some kind of French pastries–I've always wished I'd come across them again. I'd never seen cashews before, so when I saw a big bowl of them and tried them, I ate so many I got sick. I didn't eat them again for ten years. Actually, I got car sick on many of these out-of-town family adventures. Mom and Dad typically told me to roll down the window to breathe fresh air. Looking back, I believe I was being gassed by my parents' cigarette smoke.

Now, my Uncle Tweety was a real character. He loved scaring us kids by jutting out his false teeth. I once asked him once why he didn't pull in his enormous belly, but he said he couldn't do it. It was just the way his belly was. Tweety's real name was Glen Anderson, but people at work called him the Swede because of his ancestry. Turns out one guy couldn't say "Swede," and it came out as "Tweed," and the Tweety nickname was born.

A couple of times a year we visited Mom's parents, Otho and Inez Ports, in Hazelhurst, Illinois, a tiny town with maybe ten houses. Even for the time, my grandparents' house, a big and old white Victorian, was primitive, although it had electricity. Running water was limited to the kitchen. To take a bath, we heated water on a woodstove in the kitchen and poured it into a galvanized steel tub. The outhouse was about one hundred feet from the house and quite an ordeal to visit in the winter. Fortunately, each bedroom had a chamber pot to pee in.

My most memorable trip was three weeks spent with the

Curtises in Louisville, Kentucky. Jean Smith Curtis was my dad's sister, married to Uncle Miles, a ceramics engineer for one of the big appliance companies. A wonderful guy in my eyes, Miles was the ideal father to my three cousins, much like Ward Cleaver in the late 1950s TV series, "Leave It to Beaver."

This 1968 trip started with my parents driving from our farm in Illinois to the big city of Louisville, seven hours away. The city was like heaven to me. I remember walking down tree-lined streets with my cousins and wandering in and out of the large stores. Not a care in the world–and no farm chores.

At one point, I piled into a station wagon with Jean and Miles and their three boys and we pulled a travel trailer all the way to California and back. This was my first, but not my last look at national parks. We visited White Sands in New Mexico, Rocky Mountain National Park in Colorado, the Grand Canyon in Arizona, along with Bryce Canyon, Zion, and the Arches National Parks in Utah, and Yosemite and Sequoia in California. We also spent a day at Disneyland.

Before this trip, which opened my eyes to travel and to the possibility of adventure, I'd never been more than two hours away from home. I've always been so grateful to Aunt Jean and Uncle Miles for this trip. My trips around Illinois and this major road trip out West were part of a travel pattern that unfolded over a lifetime. Almost all of the travel I've done is situational, meaning that it depended on work or friends, or later, on things like the location of soccer tournaments or cycling races.

DOWN ON THE FARM

In general, travel was limited to seeing relatives close to home, which I imagine was true for many of us raised on farms, or during that era. Growing up in a farming family influenced my life in innumerable ways–it's literally true that you can take the boy off the farm, but you can't take the farm off the boy. For one thing, after spending eighteen years doing farm workday in and day out, no job I ever had was too hard or too dirty–or too strenuous. Because hard physical work was so much a part of my daily life, the idea of walking, running, or cycling anywhere came naturally to me. I also participated in some organized sports like little league baseball, then later football, track, and briefly, wrestling. Like all good boys, I liked to play basketball in the park.

When we lived three miles north of Davis, Illinois, population three hundred, the school bus dropped the town kids off first and then it looped up and down the country roads to let the farm kids off. Since I was one of the last kids to be dropped off, this three-mile journey, as the crow flies, from Davis to home took almost an hour. One day, when I was in sixth grade, I had the idea to get off the bus in Davis and jog home. I don't know how long it took but it wasn't an hour.

I'd done the three-mile jog a few times, when a stranger slowed down as he passed me in his car and offered me a ride. I accepted and a few minutes later, he dropped me off at home. When I told Mom about getting a ride, she was horrified, just as parents would be today. Never again was I to accept rides from strangers, or even get off the bus in Davis. But the real point is that at age eleven, or so, it hadn't occurred to this farm boy that a three-mile run was a big deal.

Like most things in my young life, the bike I learned to ride on was second hand–and rusty. I was in kindergarten when Dad had me hop on the bike, so he could give me a push down a steep hill in our backyard. Bad idea. Predictably, the bike and I separated and I tumbled down the hill. I pretty much avoided Dad's help from then on.

Since I attended half-day kindergarten, I had plenty of time on my hands for bike riding by trial and error. Given the kinds of accidents waiting to happen on our farm, I wasn't afraid of much, and certainly not falling. I managed to go ten feet before going down, bike and all. When I managed about 15 feet, I ran to brag to Mom and beg her to come out to watch.

It wasn't long before I could ride it up the driveway, one of the few places to ride. Eventually, as I got older, I wanted to go places on the bike, and I got the idea to ride to my best friend Merle's house, a nearly five-mile trip. No big deal these days, but for a seventh grader who rarely rode, let alone on my crummy single speed bike, it was quite an adventure, albeit slow going. (I guess you could say my travel days and cycling excursions had begun!) On the gravel road to Davis, I had to pass a house with dogs that dutifully came out and chased me–and scared me in the process, but also pushed me to ride even faster than I'd ever done before. Merle's folks gave me a ride home later and I decided never to do that again.

As it turned out, cycling became one of my most important pursuits and involved competition and travel. I ended up with state-the-art equipment, but it all started with a single-speed rust-bucket of a bike.

I was about ten when I played on the local Little League baseball team, more or less a new experience. But living in a small town meant that if you showed up, you generally made the team. The baseball field was at the end of our long driveway, about a quarter mile from my house, so transportation to the game wasn't an issue. I played in the outfield, a dull place to hang out, but I hit a triple my first time up to bat. Not long after, I was hit by a pitch, almost certainly by accident, because the pitchers weren't particularly good. But from that at-bat on, I was nervous stepping up to the plate. So much for my baseball career.

Although sports, or physical education, had been part of school for some kids before World War II, the post-war baby boom ushered in an expansion of boys' sports that became a significant part of childhood culture. For some boys, but certainly not all, playing sports was a significant right-of-passage.

During middle school, we had regular gym class where we were taught all sorts of sports–flag football, golf, volleyball, soccer, and a few others. Soccer was something of an outlier, because it wasn't popular in the United States at the time. Many of us never saw a professional soccer game, and we didn't know it was wildly popular and important in virtually every other country in the world. I really disliked soccer because we didn't know what we were doing. We'd swarm the ball like bees, kicking at and making more contact with other guys' ankles than the ball.

Football was another story, a major popular high school sport back then as it still is now. We practiced twice a day in the August heat–running and doing push-ups and leg lifts until we could barely stand, let alone move. Brutal. All the while the coaches yelled at us. At the time, freshman scrimmaged with the varsity team, so it was my ninety-five pounds versus the one-hundred-eighty-pound seniors. It was a painful massacre. Today, with much more parental involvement, schools and coaches pay more attention to equipment, for example. For one thing, my equipment was way too big for me, slipping and sliding around.

I'm mentioning these sports because these were typical things boys could do in school. We had wrestling and I was in the lightest weight group and like other sports, we practiced and worked out. I competed in a few matches but didn't last long at the sport. I felt terrible about quitting wrestling, and the coach pleaded with me to come back. It's possible he even talked with my parents. They never commented on it, but I could tell Ray and Sue were happy not to have the hassle of doing my chores.

Between these sports, the bike, and farm work, I was in good shape. If anything, injury was more of a risk than lack of strength, even with my small frame.

For a farm kid like me, the big challenge was going to team practices after school, but also to get home in time to do my chores. My typical chores included feeding the animals, bringing the cows from the field to the barn to be milked, milking and cleanup, and various other jobs that took about three hours after school. When I did miss some chore time, my siblings, usually Ray or Sue, were left to pick up the slack. Although I don't remember them giving me a hard time, I felt guilty for leaving my work to them.

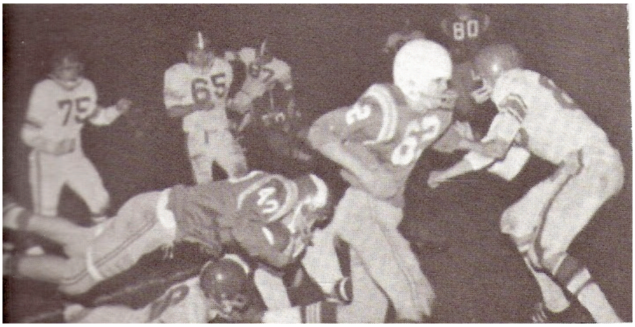
I also dreaded asking my dad for anything. Even a ride home from school after practice could be met with disapproval. The high school in Dakota was nine miles away, and my bike was such a wreck I never even thought to ride it there and back.

I did my junior year at Turner High School near Beloit, Wisconsin. Looking back, junior year was sort of wasted–no sports, no friends, not a single one. For all of school years before that, I'd been part of one group of friends, but I didn't know anyone at the school. It was about a forty-minute drive from our house outside of Beloit to Davis, so I'd drive to school even before I was old enough to get a driver's license. By this time, Sue had an apartment in Davis and I'd typically stay overnight with her. In October of 1969 I got my license and could get back and forth legally. I ended up going to classes in Beloit during the week and on the weekends I partied with my Davis and Dakota friends.

At the end of my junior year, my father bought another dairy farm south of Orfordville, Wisconsin, so I had my senior year at Parkview High School in that town. I hated the change, but it turned out okay. Instead of sitting on the sidelines there, I went out for the football team and drove myself to and from the twice daily practices in the hot August weather.

Before school started I'd made friends with other guys on the football team, my first being Dave Daniels, who would later become my brother-in-law. I played the "weak side" guard, meaning I'd line up on the side where the play wasn't going to be. We weren't a very good team–how good could we be with a one-hundred-thirty-pound kid in the guard position? Whether we were good players or not, football allowed me to make many friends, which gave me a way to connect with more people when school started.

There I am, number 62, leading a sweep around the right end.



I'm 62, a 'pulling' guard. The running back is supposed to follow me around the end, but you can see him getting tackled at the line of scrimmage.

I also went out for track, which my brother had done. He ran long distances, which also seemed to be the best fit for me, and I mostly ran the mile. The main part of our training was to run ten 440-yard sprints. Our goal was to run each of them in a minute, which I couldn't do.

At that time, I had no idea about what constituted a good training program, but in my spare time I ran around the countryside around our farm. Predictably, I soon developed shin splints, in part because I had crummy shoes that were more like tennis shoes, but lacked the support of what we later came to think of running shoes. Some years later I learned about better shoes, ice, and exercises. My best ever mile was five minutes even. Not terrible for a little school, but not great.

BEYOND HIGH SCHOOL

After the long road trip with my aunt and uncle and three cousins, my travel days were more or less over, with the exception of the nearby family visits. But after graduating from Parkview High School, my best friend, Rick Garland, suggested that we drive to Miami, Florida, to see his grandfather. I was happy to accept. We took off and stayed with Jean and Miles in Louisville and my Aunt Marie in Athens, Georgia, along the way. In addition to the chance to see my relatives, we had a free place to stay.

That summer trip after high school was an interlude of sorts, because I soon began working and taking classes at vocational school in Beloit, Wisconsin. I didn't participate in any kind of sports or exercise beyond the farm work. However, when I joined the Army in 1972, basic training involved building a level of physical fitness, and it wasn't optional. As I described earlier, besides the marching, we had to prepare for a physical fitness test that consisted of five events.

Before going overseas, we lived on bases in Missouri, Virginia, and Massachusetts. After basic training and for the rest of my time in the Army, I wasn't involved in organized sports. Still, physical fitness paid off when we were stationed in Germany for almost a year and I had to rely on my bicycle to get around, at least until Rebecca was about to be born, when we got a car.

Elsewhere, I talked about what an eye-opening experience it was for a couple of kids from rural Wisconsin to find themselves in Germany and get a sense of another country. It was the first leg of what became a lifetime of foreign travel. We were able to take advantage of monthly bus trips organized for members of the military. Every place seemed interesting to us. One weekend we visited the mad King Ludvig's Castles of Neuschwanstein and Linderhof. Another time we were off to Paris. We had little money, so we learned to find our meals from food carts and grocery stores.

In the spring of 1975, we drove from Augsburg, German, to Zurich, Switzerland, then over the Swiss Alps to Innsbruck, Austria, before heading back to Augsburg with a stop in Oberammergau, Germany, the site of the famous annual Passion Play. It was a great trip partly because it was sunny and bright on most days. As it happened, we didn't see much sun during the time we lived in Augsburg.

We visited these places because we hadn't seen them, the people spoke German, and we weren't too far away. Of course, we took this trip, and many others, when we had paper road maps to help us navigate. Decades would pass before we had GPS and smartphones. As I studied the map looking for roads, most of them wiggled back and forth on the map but then stopped, presenting a puzzle to solve. Eventually, we found a path from Zurich that would take us to Austria, an amazing drive that took us through spectacular valleys, typically with a rushing river alongside, and the Alps on both sides.

Then there was the car. These days we worry about seat belts, airbags. and car seats–all in the future and not part of our road adventure. Jimmy was loose in the back seat and Rebecca was in a bassinet behind the back seat. I can only imagine how bad a collision would have been for all of us, but especially for Rebecca.

As the car laboriously chugged up the road we began to see large metal grates jutting out from the hillside, poking up over the road. I had no idea what they were for, but as we got higher they were covered with snow. We eventually realized they were to keep the snow off the road and keep falling boulders or avalanches from knocking us down into the valley. Eventually, we crested the Alps and briefly passed through the principality of Liechtenstein and into Austria.

On the way down we saw signs for *zimmer*, which means room in German. This was long before Airbnb, but still, people put up signs to rent a room. We stopped at one towards the end of the day. For not much money we had a place to stay and they fed us breakfast–literally a bed and breakfast.

The next day we were in Innsbruck, a beautiful town nestled in between peaks of the Alps, made even more memorable by our lunch. When we arrived, I found the information office near the main train station and asked, in German, if he'd recommend a good, but not too expensive restaurant. He did, and I was able to follow his directions and find the restaurant. We had a remarkably good meal that didn't break our modest bank.

I can still recall the building, old and gothic looking. The sturdy furniture was dark wood covered with tablecloths. The waiter served the food on platters and from bowls, but when I cleaned the meat and potatoes off my plate, I reached for more. I didn't get far, because the waiter quickly served me. I'd never seen anything like this before and seldom since.

Some trips are more memorable than others. For me, the military bus trip to Dachau, the concentration camp, permanently raised my awareness of the Holocaust, which I hadn't thought about much before then. *The Diary of Anne Frank* was assigned reading in high school, so I knew about that one piece of what had happened. But that didn't prepare me, or Kay, for the camp.

Dachau was leveled after the war but then rebuilt as an exhibition in 1965. We visited in 1974. It was creepy seeing the photographs of the hideous experiments that were performed on the prisoners. Kay and I had brought our lunches. The picnic benches were next to the crematoriums of all things. I'll never forget the dark, gloomy, cold feeling of the place. If there was ever a time I didn't finish a meal, it was then.

Travel always seems like the fun part of life, but there are times when it can also be life-altering and profound. It's one of the reasons I think it's so valuable. The road trip with Jean and Miles and their family changed me in ways I wasn't conscious of at the time. Then, even the glimpses of Europe I had during my military service, opened my eyes, too. Visiting Dachau was certainly one of those excursions that I've never forgotten.

NEW HOME, NEW LIFE

Not long after our trip through the Alps, my army days were over and we started a new life at the university in Madison, Wisconsin. I again relied on walking and biking, although during our first winter in Madison I tried to ride my bike to classes and had to scratch that plan. One day we had so much ice covering the road that I couldn't stop at University Avenue, the main street through campus. I actually had to lay the bike down to keep from flying through the major intersection. After that I walked in the winter.

During those years in Madison, we purchased a tiny tent camper and did little trips around Wisconsin, and also had a memorable trip to Disney World. One night at the resort, we took the kids to the buffet, a reasonably priced option, but still costly to us. Rebecca had just turned three and was such a picky eater she consumed almost nothing. When it was time to pay I explained to the waiter that my daughter hadn't eaten anything and I hoped we wouldn't need to pay for her. The waiter mentioned that if she were two years old or under, it was free anyway. So, in the spirit of setting a bad example I said, "Well of course she's two." Rebecca butted right in and said, "I'm three, I'm three!" We continued ruining our daughter by saying that she was just a little confused because her birthday was coming up soon. We'll never know if he believed us, but we didn't have to pay.

The next morning, we heard Jimmy and Rebecca playing with other kids at the campground. Rebecca told these kids she was two. Jimmy didn't hesitate to say, "Rebecca, you're three, you're only two when we go out to eat." Egad, we knew we were heading straight to parenting hell!

By Florida standards, the weather, in the 60s and cloudy, wasn't considered so great, but compared to sub-zero temperatures in Wisconsin, we had a great time. I mentioned to Kay how it would be nice to live in a warmer place. I was afraid that Kay's family would keep us anchored in Wisconsin.

But by January of 1978, I was being courted by many companies located all over the country, and we began visiting these corporate sites, eventually settling in San Diego where I accepted a position with Hewlett Packard.

As I mentioned, Kay and I were "wined and dined" by Shell Oil in Houston, Texas. We stayed in the downtown Hyatt Regency, a step up for the two of us. The center of the building was an enormous atrium with trees and waterfalls–it was like a jungle there. I still recall how unfamiliar so many things seemed at the time, like the linen tablecloth, a first, at least for me. Kay and I had a good time seeing what was available outside of Wisconsin, but not long after that, we headed for San Diego.

I am always doing what I cannot do yet in order to learn how to do it.
– Vincent Van Gogh

CHAPTER 10

FUN AND GAMES 2: GOODBYE WISCONSIN, HELLO SOCCER–AND MORE

The more difficult the victory, the greater the happiness in winning.
– Pelé

Soccer came into my life again not long after I started working at Hewlett Packard in San Diego. At that time HP had a machine shop and it was staffed by foreigners, mostly Europeans. American men might organize a pick-up basketball game, but for these guys from other countries soccer was their game. They'd get together at lunch and kick a ball around. I started joining them, along with Dewey Baker, a new friend, and several other engineers. I was impressed with how these older guys, often slow and out of shape, were so much better at soccer than the rest of us. We kept at it and very slowly we became better at the game.

Soccer is a little like learning a new language after puberty–you'll always speak with an accent. Accent or not, I started playing soccer in 1979 and never stopped. It's forty-four years and counting. Long ago, I accepted that I'll never have the touch of a lifelong soccer player.

“CORPORATE SOCCER”

With so much interest in soccer, HP formed a soccer team and we played in a local league. For a brief time, 1978 to 1984, San Diego had an outdoor soccer team called the Sockers. They played in the Jack Murphy stadium, later renamed the Qualcomm stadium, which was built for football and the San Diego Chargers. It wasn’t ideal for soccer and could seat many more people than a soccer game could attract. A good crowd for soccer meant drawing around twenty thousand fans and even then the stadium looked empty. In order to sell more tickets, they said that any amateur club that would sell two hundred tickets, could play an exhibition game before the Sockers played. Our HP team played two exhibition games at the stadium.

SOCCER TAKES CENTER STAGE

I will never forget what it felt like to step out on that big field. A proper soccer field is one-hundred-twenty yards long, in contrast to one hundred yards for football, plus it’s wider than a football field too. The stadium had beautiful green manicured grass. We amateurs normally played on fields that were hard, bumpy, with blades of grass here and there. The stadium field was big and the soft grass slowed down the ball. Balls would get kicked and roll to a stop in bounds. In any case, playing at the stadium was a lot of fun and afterwards we’d watch the professionals play.

At some point, while still in my thirties, I’d progressed enough in the sport that an Irish friend, Sean Underwood, asked if I wanted to play on his Division 2 team, Clan na Gael. For the first time I was on a team that had practices, drills and scrimmages. I liked that part, but playing actual games with them was a different story.

These players seemed to think that if you weren't bloody after the game, you weren't doing it right. They played a rough, chippy style that would infuriate the other team. At least two of the games during our season were terminated early because of the fights that broke out.

Soon after that experience I moved on to age-based soccer leagues. Once again my friend Dewey introduced me to the Rancho Santa Fe soccer club. I joined their over-forty team, eventually graduating to over fifty, then over fifty-seven, and I'm currently playing on an over-sixty-five team. I've heard an over-seventy league will be starting in San Diego and I see that in my future. I joined the soccer team, North Carolina United, to play in national and international 70+ soccer tournaments.

WEAR AND TEAR

During the years I played soccer, I also was active in other physical pursuits from cycling to running and a few more. It goes without saying that playing soccer at a fairly intense level includes a lot of wear and tear on the body. These days I joke that I play the sport in between injuries. In my early days, and with some regularity, I'd land sideways on my foot, hear a pop, and go down hard. My ankle would swell up and I'd be sidelined with a sprain for a few weeks. Strained hamstrings and quads are also way too familiar. I've stressed my left quad muscle so many times that I can feel a hollow spot in it where it has detached and reattached.

I've been lucky with my knees. After considerable stress on them, I had arthroscopic surgery on my right knee to repair scar tissue and a torn meniscus. For the past year, I've been recovering from plantar fasciitis and have had a cortisone shot to help it heal. I'm ready to admit that I'm one major injury away from giving up soccer. Fortunately, there are many other sports and activities that I like to do.

PLAY SOCCER, SEE THE WORLD

Playing in tournaments with various soccer teams has taken me quite literally all over the world, from Las Vegas to Nashville, Chicago to Orlando to Honolulu, but across borders as well, including Canada, Thailand, Argentina, and Morocco. These opportunities occurred, at least in part, because I've been fortunate to play with several former college and professional players. We've also won several tournaments, including the 2004 Men's Friendship Tournament in Las Vegas, in the over-fifty category, and the 65+ Thailand Invitational in 2017, and the Honolulu Mayor's Gold Cup 68+ in 2022.

In 2023, I was eligible to play in the over-seventy age group. We were semifinalists at the Veteran's Cup in North Carolina and the Florida Classic. We won our age group in the Pattaya, Thailand tournament.

The Thailand Invitational in Bangkok, 2017, involved the most pageantry. Before the games we lined up and paraded out with the referees. It was like watching the World Cup, except that we didn't have a young child to hold our hand as we made our way to the field. The national anthems were played before we started. The stadiums had electronic billboards showing the USA versus whoever we were playing in that game. This was as close to professional soccer as I'll ever get. The U.S. played against teams from Taiwan and Japan, and the final was against Thailand.

Because our current team is made up of players from around the world, teammates sometimes will set up soccer matches for us in their home countries. For example, my teammate, Nourdean Anakar, has set up matches in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and Tangiers, Morocco. Other teammates have set up games in Peru. These trips are really more social than for soccer. We get to experience their countries with a native guide to show us around. That's probably one of the biggest advantages of travel that grows out of something else, like a special interest, or in my case, too, is connected with work.

Before I left to work for Gemplus in France, my team signed our team photo for me.

Jim can't wait to visit! Jim & Karen
Jimmy Enjoy the Surf of France and come back soon!
Jimmy Bon Voyage! We'll miss you All the best
Jim - Joueur de Football le magnifique! Avoir, Brent
Jim, We will miss you in the field. Practice hard to come back next year. Bon Voyage!
Best of Luck
Jim, Que perderemos usted nosotros esperamos su regreso.
Rancho Santa Fe Soccer 2009
Jim, we will miss you - who is going to protect me for the next year. Have a blast - see you @ RSF soccer soon! Patrick
Have a great time in Spain Jimmy! See you in a year.
Au revoir Jim Come back kid Mark

When I left for our year in Provence my soccer team gave me this signed team picture. I'm kneeling second from the right.

A SOCCER ADVENTURE I NEVER ANTICIPATED

Travel, and even living abroad as an expat, was part of my work life. By the time of our year in Aix-en-Provence in 2010, Jane Lea and I were married, Emma attended French public kindergarten, and I was still involved in playing soccer and looked around for a team I could join. In the U.S. there are a lot of older guys playing soccer, and I've played on 40+ to 65 + teams. In France, however, the oldest team I could find was 35+. Someone suggested I should check out the Puyricard soccer club. The club was about a ten-minute drive from where we were staying. One evening when the Veterans (the over-thirty-five team) were practicing, I went to see them. The manager, Francois Laurent, was welcoming and said if I had my soccer shoes I could scrimmage with them right then. So, I joined the team.

Signing up for a French team required some paperwork, and the physical came first. I asked around and got the name of a physician to do whatever was needed. I don't remember making an appointment, but I walked into the building and found the doctor's office door with instructions to wait in the open room next door. A few people were sitting around in that room and I asked, "*Qui est le dernier*?" or "Who's last?" Someone raised his hand and I sat down. I observed that every several minutes the doctor would come out and say, "Who's next?" or "*Qui est le suivant?*"

Eventually it was my turn and I went inside a room with an office desk and chairs, where we sat, and an examination table. Using my poor French, we chatted about what I needed and about any medical problems I might have. Then he gave me a brief examination. He said the fee was twenty euros, and once I paid him, he gave me a physical certificate and I was on my way.

I was impressed by how inexpensive and simple this process was. If I'd had a French medical card, it wouldn't have cost anything. But there was no nurse or administration involved.

After this step, my "FIFA transfer papers" were requested. FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) is the worldwide soccer governing body. I understood that professional players would have transfer papers, but I'd never been part of such a system. But in France, even the Veterans were under the FIFA umbrella. I assured them that I didn't have FIFA papers and had no idea how I'd ever get them. Fortunately, they didn't make a big deal of it.

The Puyricard soccer facility probably wasn't a big deal by French standards, but it was more and better than I was used to. At the time I was there, they had a grass field, a dirt/cinder field, and a clubhouse. We scrimmaged and usually played on the dirt field, which was a bit like a baseball infield and would be dragged smooth every so often. After every scrimmage, the players would crowd into the club house for beer and snacks. My French was never good enough to actively participate in the conversations, but I'd listen and pick up words here and there. If someone asked me a question, I'd be able to get it after having it repeated once or twice, and I'd come up with a reasonable answer using the words I had at my command.

Every Saturday we'd either have a home game or we'd play at a club at another small village in the Aix-en-Provence region. The hosting club would always put on a reception for both teams after the game.

This was a 35+ team and, except for me, the maximum age was forty or so. I was fifty-six. Needless to say, I wasn't a star on the team but they seemed happy to have me. One fellow said, "*Grâce à tu, nous sommes une équipe internationale,"* or "Thanks to you, we're an international team."

I always played some of the game in the outside fullback position. I had speed I could use to get in the way and block or slow down the other team's offense, and as the season progressed I played more and more. At the end of the season, we said our goodbyes. Laurent gave me a nice Puyricard team jacket. I wish I'd thought of bringing a gift for him. It was a great experience, and I look back on that time and the team fondly.

After France, I thought I was returning to San Diego, but Jane Lea's job took us to the Chicago area. I looked around for teams and found an over-forty team, Windy City United, run by Boris Vukovic. Until cold weather set in, they had an outdoor season, and then some of them played indoors at the Odeum Center in Addison, Illinois, a town next to Elmhurst, where we lived. The best thing about playing at the Odeum was that after the game, we'd stop for beer at the Golden Pheasant in Elmhurst. This restaurant was in a building resembling a lodge and had opened in 1948. Offering American and Czech classics and cocktails, it was one of the remaining signs of the ethnic roots of not only this town, but so many Midwest towns and cities.

After one of our post-game beer sessions, I asked if there was an older age group soccer team. By that time, I was approaching sixty and playing open and over-forty soccer was getting harder and harder. One of my soccer friends suggested that I talk to Joe Messina who played on an over-fifty soccer team based in Oak Park, a Chicago suburb not far from Elmhurst.

That contact led to becoming connected with Mark Ochoa, Evaristo Ruiz, Charlie Shenk, Tom Sundling, Andy Taylor, and others. We'd scrimmage at Concordia University and then we'd end up at Molly Malone's in Forest Park. That was a great place with free popcorn. Andy made sure we gave big tips to the wait staff and we got great service. Unfortunately, Malone's shut down and we migrated to O'Sullivan's, which wasn't bad, but not the same.

Sitting around the table, we'd critique each other's soccer performance, chat about other soccer games, especially the English Premier League, and tell jokes. I'd try to drink as slowly as possible. Many of these folks could drink more beer than I could manage. In fact, they were good soccer players, but I thought they were even better beer drinkers. So, I borrowed a term from a running group I'd been part of, the Hash House Harriers, whose motto was, "Beer drinkers with a running problem." I named our group, "Beer drinkers with a soccer problem." Below is a picture of several of my friends after a soccer match in Orlando, Florida in

2019. Charlie, in the foreground, is wearing a shirt designed by a friend's graphics designer daughter.

In 2015, we returned to San Diego and I rejoined my old Rancho Santa Fe team. In 2022, I went to the Mayor's Gold Cup soccer tournament in Honolulu with San Diego friends, and we won. In January of 2023, I went to the same tournament with my Chicago friends. We had a good time, played well, but finished in the middle of the standings. As I said, good soccer players, better beer drinkers.

Jim, Charlie Shenk, Joe Messina, Mark Ochoa, Evaristo Ruiz. Oak Park, Illinois soccer friends. I nicknamed our group "beer drinkers with a soccer problem".

At this point, my soccer life is somewhat competitive, but more and more it has to be social. In other words, I like to go to tournaments in interesting locations with fun people. Obviously, soccer has combined the best of both worlds within my passion–the sport itself and the enormous travel opportunities

ANOTHER PASSION: CYCLING

Until I started to work for HP as a young guy still in my 20s, I rode a bike for inexpensive transportation, like millions of Americans, especially young people. My time at HP changed all that. For one thing, I was surrounded by serious cyclists. Rick Smith, a friend and colleague, took two weeks of his vacation to attend a bicycle maintenance class. Another friend, Neil Bankston, had been a competitive national cyclist. I remarked to Neil that cycling didn't seem too hard. Sure, you had to do some work to pedal up a hill but then you got to coast down the other side. Neil looked at me with a serious expression and said, "You haven't ridden a bike much have you?"

Around 1980, I made my first serious bike ride, and it combined travel and cycling, a hilly seventy miles from Tecate to Ensenada, Mexico. My occasional previous rides were ten miles to work. I had an old steel 10-speed bike, but no special equipment like bike shorts, shoes, or gloves. Rick Smith and some other friends also were doing this seventy-mile ride, and I reverted to my usual response, "How bad could it be?"

A friend of Rick's drove a van loaded with several of us and a trailer for our bikes. Tecate is a Mexican border town of a hundred thousand people, located about thirty miles east of Tijuana, Mexico. It's most known for the beer of the same name. *Thousands* of bike riders took off and headed south. For the first twenty miles or so I was making good time and skipping the food and drink stations. But not long after that, my butt started getting sore and my legs were chafing. Bicycle shorts and more preparation would have helped that. The next forty miles got more and more challenging. We'd go up one hill then down another and repeat.

Around ten miles from the finish line we crested the last big hill. It was all downhill from there. Unfortunately, by this time my butt was so sore, I could only stand on the pedals. Because a big onshore wind was coming off the Pacific Ocean, simply coasting wasn't possible. Instead, I had to pedal to make progress down the hill. I was exhausted when I finally crossed the finish line in Ensenada. I think of that as the second most exhausted I'd ever been. First place would be when I was sixteen, hiking into the Grand Canyon in June with my cousin, Don Curtis, during that epic trip. We hiked out around eight miles, descending nearly a mile in 100-degree heat, with only a water bottle and a peanut and jelly sandwich. Coming back, I could trudge up the path for only about one hundred feet before having to sit and rest.

After this introduction to cycling, over the next several years I gradually cycled more and more and got myself the gear I'd once ridiculed, cycling shorts, gloves, and bike shoes. I picked up tips during lunch hour bike rides with HP friends, Bill Braamse and Bob Giles. I learned how to stay close to the rider in front of me and draft, which cut down the wind and made it much easier on downhills and flats. On the uphills you just have to work. I'd hang on to the wheel in front of me for as long as I could. When I felt like I was dying of exhaustion, sometimes I'd think, ”Hang on another ten seconds, just another ten seconds.” Sometimes I'd have to ease up and be dropped by the group. On these friendly rides the group would wait at the top of the climb to collect the stragglers. Week by week I could hang on to the back of the group longer and longer until finally I could stay with the group all the way to the top.

After months of riding with my friends, they invited me into their racing club, the Rancheros of Poway. I rode about five miles from my house in San Marcos to meet the group on Bear Valley Parkway, a long gradual uphill road. The thirty-member group was going up the hill at a leisurely pace. I was naive and made my way to the front of the line and pushed the pace because I saw it as a little too slow. Just a bit of a push, I thought. No problem.

The group made its way around Escondido, and on the back side of Escondido we came to a longer steeper climb and the group took off. I struggled to keep within sight of the slowest member of the group! At the top of the climb the leaders waited, we regrouped, and I reflected on what I'd learned. The group would take it easy until they got to challenging hills and then race to the top. I learned that even if you think you're fast, there are people much faster than you, and you won't figure it out until you challenge each other.

USA Cycling has five categories for men's road racing. Typically, beginners start out at 5 and work their way up; professional cycling is above category 1. The people I rode with were mostly categories 4 and 3. As I rode more and more I progressed to a point that I wasn't the slowest of the Rancheros, but I was still near the back.

I also joined the San Diego Bicycle Club. On Saturday mornings I'd ride about 8 miles to their starting place at the UTC mall. That group rode north around Rancho Santa Fe and then down the coast through Del Mar, where I'd jump off and head home. It would be around a fifty-mile bike ride and I'd be home by lunchtime.

I've had several crashes, one on the way to work in the morning to Rancho Bernardo from San Marcos. Perhaps I was sleepy, so I didn't notice a car illegally parked in the bike lane until it was too late. I slammed on the brakes, but slid into the back of a Pinto Wagon, smushing into the back window. It makes me think of the movie "Top Secret," in which a car barely taps the back of a Pinto and it explodes. I bruised my ribs, and the bike's fork was bent. I made it to work, but the bike handled very badly and I soon replaced it.

In another incident, I was on my way from home in San Marcos to work at ASYMTEK in Carlsbad. I stopped and then went straight through the intersection at the three-way stop sign. The stopped car to my right may not have seen me because he went when I did. I hit the car's back left corner as he turned left in front of me. He stopped, but then a car from the third stop sign ran into him. Quite a mess. No one was injured and my bike was okay so I continued on to work. Soon after I developed sciatica, which was said to be caused by a herniated disk. I've always wondered if my disk hadn't been damaged in that accident.

Probably my worst bike accident was towards the end of the Rosarito to Ensenada, Mexico, bike race in 1999. I'd done this race several times, always using a mountain bike because the road is rather rough. I typically went with Greta and Rob Kerner and other friends. We'd go down the night before, stay in Ensenada and then take a bus to the starting line in Rosarito the morning of the race.

At the time I was training for a half ironman triathlon, which included a fifty-six-mile bike ride. So, I got up early, rode the fifty miles to Rosarito and had an easy fifty-mile bike ride back to Ensenada with friends. Near Ensenada, Rob Kerner and I were going down the last big hill. In slow motion I can picture my bike rotating clockwise. I bounced and slid on the nasty rough asphalt at between 25 and 30 miles an hour. The helmet was scratched but protected my head. My bike clothes were shredded like doilies but kept me with only light scrapes. My exposed elbow and knee didn't fare so well. My elbow was bleeding profusely.

This was me before starting the Rosarito to Ensanada bike ride in 1990.

With thousands of cyclists in the race, there were many medical professionals and an ambulance was close by. They wanted to take me back to the States but I didn't want to miss the festivities later that evening in Ensenada, so they took me to the local Red Cross. I wasn't in such bad shape compared to the patient next to me, a large guy with a stomach abscess. From his moans and screams he must have been in great pain.

As for me, nurses carefully cleaned my wounds and administered antiseptic ointment and gauze pads. They released me to my friends with a prescription for antibiotics. I had no intention of taking the antibiotics, because at the time the issue of overprescribing antibiotics was increasingly discussed. My friends Bill Richards and Alejandro Borgia had other ideas, though, and made me take them. Later my son told me about blood infections that could develop with injuries like mine, and even kill me quickly. If the Red Cross had led with that explanation, I wouldn't have balked at taking the meds.

After the bike race. Notice the bandaged elbow and knee. I was in a bad crash.

My last bad crash was descending Noble Canyon on a mountain bike with Dennis Mudd and Dan Goese. Both were faster and more competent riders than I. I've done that difficult ride a few times without issue but it has been the cause of injuries for many people. We were at the beginning of the moderate easy downhill portion with Dennis in front and Dan behind me. Dennis had just commented on how fast and well I was riding. My front wheel went into a small hole, my bike stopped and I catapulted into the ground helmet first, and then hit my shoulder.

The bike was a Specialized Epic mountain bike with disc brakes. Until this bike I'd only used caliper brakes. Caliper brakes don't stop you too quickly and are almost useless in the rain. I had the habit of resting my fingers on the brake levers. But disk brakes always work much more aggressively. I think when my wheel went into the little hole, my fingers pushed on the brake levers and the bike stopped.

My shoulder hurt, but I wasn't sure if I'd broken my collar bone. From stories of how painful that break can be, I doubted it. I held my left arm to my chest and started walking down the hill with Dan beside me handling both bikes. Dennis took off down the hill to bring his truck up the road to pick us up. Overall, it took more than two hours to get to urgent care where the x-ray confirmed the broken collarbone. I was fitted with a figure 8 truss and sent on my way.

The next day I made an appointment to see a specialist just to make sure it would heal without complications. He wanted to see the original x-ray so I picked it up from urgent care. I looked at the film and was immediately concerned. I'd fractured bones in the past and the x-ray would show a dark line. This time it looked like a chicken bone broken into two pieces, which made me leap ahead to imagining surgery in my near future. However, the next x-ray showed the bone back in line, meaning that the figure 8 truss I'd been wearing was working perfectly.

CYCLING + TRAVEL = ADVENTURE

After the sale of Musicmatch in 2004, I started a series of bike riding (mostly mountain bike) adventures with Dennis Mudd, my friend and Musicmatch cofounder. Travel became part of the planning. Our trips included rides in North Vietnam in 2005, and one starting in Argentina and extending through Chile to Tierra del Fuego. We also crossed Costa Rica from the Pacific to the Atlantic along the Ruta de los Conquistadores. We did another ride across Spain and France from the Mediterranean along the spine of the Pyrenees. We made a loop around Northern Macedonia, and one in India around Delhi, and one through Nepal's Mustang Valley, and the Golden Triangle region of Thailand. I'm likely leaving out a couple of trips, but I believe the adventure in Vietnam in 2005 was the first cycling trip, and the last trip (so far) was in India in 2017.

The Vietnam trip was amazing–and challenging. It was led by KE Adventures, a British tour company. The guide was an excellent leader, cyclist, and bike mechanic but had never done this trip before so he relied on local guides. The guides knew only their own locales but weren't good cyclists and didn't know how to feed foreign tourists. We spent a lot of time being lost and looking for food.

We started the trip from a hotel in Lao Cai, and then rode from hotel to hotel for eight days, finishing up in the Ba Be national park north of Hanoi. For much of the trip there was little to no vehicle support. If your bike broke down or you broke down, it wasn't easy to simply get into a van and go to the hotel. Since we were riding the whole time, we encountered segments of bad terrain, not good for cycling. We rode through terrible weather, and through a crowded city.

Later, I decided the next trip would include more support, like a bus to hold our bikes and equipment. On that type of tour, a bus takes the riders to the good biking areas and picks them up and transports the group around the bad areas, and then we end up in a decent hotel with good food.

This kind of adventure-travel became increasingly popular over my lifetime, along with making travel to more remote locations possible–and comfortable. When I was growing up, no one I knew would have considered the possibility of going to Antarctica, yet today, cruises are available that offer high-end accommodation. A more rugged type of travel to the region has expanded, too. Even trips to climb Mt. Everest are available if you want to go badly enough to pay the high cost.

Below are some pictures of the most challenging day of cycling. We started at 7:00 a.m. in the rain and rode up and down muddy hills, stopping for lunch in a mud hut for lunch at 2:00 in the afternoon. By this time, we'd climbed up a few thousand feet and were terribly cold and wet. Hadn't I heard that shivering is the last thing a hypothermic person remembers? Why wasn't anyone complaining? There were seven men and five women on the trip, so I convinced myself that if everyone else could endure it, I certainly could. (By the end of the trip, though, pretty much everyone complained about this badly run trip.)

The muddiest day ever in North Vietnam.

Jim and Dennis after a cold, wet, and very muddy day in Vietnam.

We finally got to our hotel after dark that evening. I'd never been covered with so much mud. The hotel staff wouldn't let us come in until they'd rinsed off at least one mud layer with a garden hose. The last picture is me with my friend Dennis Mudd. Of course he's happy, his name is Mudd.

Dennis, and I had booked the trip with KE Adventures, and our flight took us to LA, Taipei, Taiwan, then Hanoi. After a night's sleep we assembled our bikes and rode in and around the city. Here is some of what I wrote down in a note about my first impressions of being in Vietnam, which I already knew had a low per capita income of around $300 per year.

> *...The streets have about 100 bikes and mopeds for every car. In general, they don't use traffic signals, just honk the horn and merge*

> *through the intersections. It works remarkably well. I didn't try it, but I suspected I could close my eyes and walk steadily across the packed street. They are masters of avoiding obstacles.*

That night we took an overnight train to Lao Cai, on the Red River, right at the border with China in Vietnam's northwest corner. Our trek was about three hundred miles, generally westerly, up and down jeep and moped trails, through the mountains, finishing eight days later in the Ba Be national park.

The weather was quite variable, from a bone shivering 40s and raining, to sauna-like 90s with 90 percent humidity. My worst moments of the trip were shivering on a dirt floored of a partially enclosed shack amongst dogs and chickens, a small smoky fire, and trying to eat a miserable cold lunch. My bike's brakes had failed, and I wasn't sure how I was going to make it down several thousand feet and twenty miles without crashing and freezing to death. But, as things do, it all worked out, partly because the bike leader was amazing. He had spare brake pads!

> *…The land is beautiful, green and mountainous, although ecologically ravaged by too many people chasing not enough resources. Terraced farming was everywhere, with lush, bright emerald-green, wet rice terraces in the bottom of the valleys. These terraced hillsides make you wonder how it can be worth it to farm and amazed at the hard effort that put it all in place.*
>
> *This region is home to most of Vietnam's ethnic minority tribes. They have names like H'mong, Mong, Dzao, and Thai. They are often sub-grouped with a color like Black H'mong, or Red Dzao, or white, green, and flowered are also used for names. Their dress is distinctive, with bright hats like red or green, or beautifully embroidered dresses.*
>
> *They've carved out niches in the valleys, or mid or high moun-*

> *tain tops, where they practice different types of agriculture. Some build houses on stilts, others have dirt floors. And of course, their facial features and languages are different, depending on whether they came from China, Laos, Cambodia, and how they were mixed together.*

Everywhere we went the people were friendly and curious, with frequent shouts of hello coming from people we passed. Whenever we stopped, crowds of people would gather to look. Sometimes they'd say a few words we couldn't understand, or they lifted our bikes, and occasionally tried to ride them. We felt like rock stars on tour.

The Vietnam trip was especially meaningful to me because the Vietnam War draft chased me into enlisting in the Army and put me on a successful path. The war was awful with around two million civilians killed. The U.S. was implicated in terrible massacres like at My Lai. But in spite of that, every person I met was friendly. Would I have done the same if I were them? I have yet to fully answer my own question.

The world is a book, and those who do not travel read only one page.
– Saint Augustine

CHAPTER 11

FUN AND GAMES 3: ADDITION, NOT SUBTRACTION

Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all.
– Helen Keller

Ambition is a poor excuse for not having enough sense to be lazy.
— Scott Adams (Dilbert)

Until I started working for HP in 1978, exercise was an afterthought, especially because of the physical demands of farm work. But once I started my "formal" career and grown-up life, so to speak, I steadily increased my physical activities as the years passed. When I started playing soccer in 1979 I picked up running to be in better condition. At first I'd run a mile and be out of gas and walk or give up. I spent the summer of 1980 in Stanford's Wilbur Hall finishing my master's degree. I had some challenging classes but also a swimming class and another one for conditioning.

The conditioning class at Stanford was helpful for me. We did many things like stretching, ultimate frisbee, fartlek running, and other activities. By the way, “fartlek” is a Swedish term which means “speed play.” It’s a training method that blends continuous (endurance) training with interval (speed) training. These are different from most running workouts, which typically target one or two paces, and also differ from intervals, during which you stop or walk for recovery.

What I took away was the knowledge that I had to get over a hump in running. The body resists going on, so I learned that I had to push through. In other words, I realized that physical challenges have strong mental components, too. On returning to our home in Escondido, I’d run three, five, and eventually ten or more miles at a time. During the 1980s, I began entering 10K runs. My times weren’t stellar, in the forty-plus minute range. At times I’d run twenty to thirty miles in a week, but I wasn’t getting any faster.

In 1990 I went to work with some friends who started ASYMTEK, and began running at lunch time with Stan Aguilar, who had run cross country for San Diego State, but now he was slower. After one of our many runs he said that he was sure that I could run a thirty-five-minute 10K. Stan is a positive can-do kind of person, so it was nice of him to say it, but I thought he was crazy. However, to humor him I said that I’d give it a try. Since I was cycling and playing soccer, I didn’t have a lot of time for running. For the most part, I did a ten-mile leisurely run on the weekend and went to the track for interval training one afternoon a week after work. By this time, I understood that if you want to run faster, you have to run faster. By this I mean that you’ll never improve your times by just adding more slow distance.

My interval workout on my own was to run ten quarter miles, each in one minute, fifteen seconds. This pace was a five-minute mile speed and if I could keep it up would yield a thirty-one-minute 10K. I trained for several months and picked a 10K race in Escondido for my challenge. I could have picked a flatter course, but I wasn't thinking about that. It was the same day as the Carlsbad 5K race which would draw the fastest runners in the US. So, at least I had no worries about competing with that group.

The day of the race I started off fast. My thought was just to follow the leader. At the one-mile mark I was in second place and my time was five minutes and 2twenty seconds. I was thinking, "Uh, oh, I'm going to slow down and a hoard of runners are going to go past me." I did slow down a bit and one runner did pass me. I crossed the finish line at thirty-five minutes, forty seconds, third overall and first in my age group. I was happy with that and that ended my "competitive" running career.

I continued to jog for conditioning. It's an efficient way to get exercise. I recommend it to others when they're thinking about fitness. Wherever you are, you can just put on your shoes and go.

As time went by, my body started complaining. First my knee, although my chronic knee problems most likely came from soccer. For a few years I could play soccer without my knee acting up too much, but a mile into a regular run the outside of my right knee felt like it was on fire. I stopped trying to run because I liked soccer better. Eventually my knee bothered me so much it affected soccer, so in 2003 I had arthroscopic surgery. The surgeon removed scar tissue on the outside edge of my knee, and also repaired a torn meniscus. After about a year of recovery I could play soccer without pain again. I could run but other things like a sore back and achy knees would take the fun out of it. So, I'm done with any significant running.

TRIATHLONS

My first 'triathlon' was as an extra on the Remington Steele TV show on the episode, "Steele in the Running," aired in 1986. My friend and HP colleague, Bob Dey, told me that the TV show needed extras. It was shot north of LA on Malibu Beach, the same location that a previous TV show, “The Rockford Files,” was filmed. The plot was about how one of the stars, Stephanie Zimbalist, was training for a triathlon and mischief ensued. The whole ten-hour day there involved just the swim portion and taking off on the bike. That was a lot of time for around ten minutes of the final show.

My biggest surprise was how cold the water was. The whole crowd of extras lined up on the beach in our small swimsuits. I’m a fast runner and when we started I made it to the water in the first line and slammed into a freezing wall of water. I’m a slow swimmer, and in shock, as the following waves of better swimmers swam over me. We only went out around one hundred feet when the director yelled “cut,” at which point we were to tread water as they got ready to film us leaving the water. We hung out in the frigid water for what seemed like forever before we could swim back to film the water exit. At lunch time I put my blanket on the beach next to one of the stars, Pierce Brosnan and his wife. We had a pleasant chat.

Bob Dey and I schemed on how to position ourselves in scenes on the beach to be included in the show. When I finally watched the episode I didn’t initially see myself at all. After watching it a couple of times I eventually caught poor glimpses of myself in a few scenes. So much for my acting career:)

In 1999, I was divorced and dating a woman who was a serious triathlon competitor, so I briefly tried my hand at triathlon competitions, too. I had cycling and running covered. I believe I was a slow swimmer mostly because I didn’t learn to swim until my twenties when I was in college. I later took a refresher class during graduate school at Stanford. It was my weakest sport and I trained by swimming laps at a local YMCA and at the Carlsbad High School’s pool with my ASYMTEK friends during lunch breaks.

I first entered a couple of quarter ironman triathlons, and then graduated to a half ironman triathlon. In late 1999, I completed my first and last half marathon around the San Dieguito County Park. By the time I crashed my bike on the Rosarito to Ensenada, Mexico, bike ride, my triathlon ambitions were over.

FAMILY, SPORTS, AND TRAVEL

After Kay and I had our European adventures in the military, and then moved to San Diego, our trips were confined to fairly local places. At some point in the 1980s, our family started an annual spring trip to Anza Borrego State Park to appreciate the wildflowers. Usually, we'd stay at the Palm Canyon Campground and take the trail up to see the hidden palm tree grove.

In the early '80s, our family went on trips with HP friends, Jody and Phil Faraci and Bernie and John Morton, to Lake Mead, Arizona, for waterskiing. In the early days when we were all relatively poor, we'd camp on the shore of Lake Mead. In later years we'd rent an air-conditioned houseboat, a much more luxurious place to stay.

I thought I was a good waterskier when John invited me to go with him to the slalom course on Mission Bay. I'd seen slalom skiing on TV and it didn't look so hard. You have to ski through two buoys at the start and the end of the course, and there are three buoys 37.5 feet to the right of center and the same distance to the left that you have to ski around. Beginners start with a 75-foot rope and the boat goes as slow as it can while still keeping them up, about 25 miles per hour for me. The pros go 36 mph and then shorten the rope. The best have a rope so short it doesn't make it out to the buoy. They have to reach out with their single ski and hook it around the buoy. As it turned out, I was slow, and not nearly as good a skier as I'd thought. The best I ever did was to make it around all of the buoys at 25 miles per hour.

Waterskiing was fun but it took a tremendous amount of time. On a ski day I'd go to John's house at 5:00AM to get the boat ready and head down to the course, which took us until 7:00AM or so. Up to four boats could reserve the course. Each boat had typically three skiers. One to drive the boat, another to watch the skier, and, of course, the skier. One turn was up and back through the course three times. Before you could go again, eleven other skiers would go. So in a morning you'd have two turns, maybe three. That was enough, though, because I'd be exhausted after two turns. Then we'd pull the boat out of the water, pack, and clean. It would be midafternoon by the time I was back home. So, the ratio of time spent to participation wasn't particularly as high, but it was fun while it lasted.

SAILBOARDING

During the years we made an annual waterskiing trip to Lake Mead, using the ski boat John Morton supplied, I had the idea to try sailboarding. As it was, water skiing required a lot of waiting and setting up the boat and such. And it was so hot we'd spend a lot of time sitting in a short lawn chair with the water up to our waists. We'd alternate between skiing and sitting around eating Red Vines (licorice), pepperoncinis (Mediterranean style peppers) and drinking beer. A lot of junk food. Sometimes the wind would come up and it would be too windy to ski, then why not use the wind to sail? I purchased a large beginner sailboard. Some people might take a lesson or practice before hauling a sailboard across the state, but not me. Remember my motto: How bad could it be?

I'd seen sailboarding, so I knew the object was to get on the board and stand up. Because this was a beginner board it was large, reasonably stable, and floated when you stood on it. Then, standing, you pull on a rope attached to the mast in order to raise the sail. Like everyone new to this, I quickly learned to make sure the wind was at my back. When I didn't get that right and I faced into the breeze, the wind pushed the sail into me and I tumbled backwards into the water.

After you master pulling up the sail, then you pull on the middle of it to bring it more perpendicular to the wind to catch air and start to propel you. Now the next part of my folly was the fact that the wind was strong enough to produce whitecaps, and I was set up with a sail too large for the conditions. It caught way too much air, would quickly get away from me, and I'd crash into the water. This was not a one-time event. Over and over, I pulled the sail up and crashed into the water.

At the same time, the wind also was blowing me away from land, so after an hour of pulling and crashing, the land was starting to get quite distant. Fortunately, I thought to roll up the sail around the mast, fold the mast back along the board, so I could lay on the board and paddle back to shore. So much for a cool alternative to water skiing. I didn't abandon my efforts entirely, and back in San Diego I'd take the board down to Mission Bay on mildly breezy days and I eventually got the hang of it.

BOOGIE BOARDING AKA BODYBOARDING

Not long after moving to San Diego I bought a couple of boogie boards, which are mostly foam with a plastic body. It has a leash that you attach to your wrist so it doesn't float away when you get knocked off. You lay on them and let the waves push you around. What could be simpler? Oh, but like many things, this is harder than it looks.

Getting out on the board you have to first walk out through the surf until it's deep enough to lay on the board. Then you paddle through small waves, at least at first. Taking a side trip now, as a kid I loved the TV detective show, "Hawaii Five 0." To a kid from the Midwest this was exotic stuff. The opening credits had a huge wave, and in my mind's eye, I recalled seeing a surfer on the wave falling off. Looking at the opening credits now, I see there was no surfer. No matter, it still seemed like falling off in a big wave would hurt, but the surfer would emerge smiling and do it again. I thought that maybe because it was just water, it wouldn't hurt so much. Once again, I was wrong. For me, anything above a three-foot wave is too big!

So, as I was saying, you first paddle over the little waves near shore and when the waves are about two feet tall, you can't paddle over them, so you do a duck dive under the wave. If the waves aren't too big, don't come too fast, and you're a strong enough swimmer, you'll get beyond the zone where waves are breaking. There you can rest as the ocean bobs up and down beneath you.

Now you lay on your board and scan the horizon for the right wave. This takes some experience to know when a wave is going to break at a place that you can take it. At some point you judge that now's the time. You paddle and kick to try to match the speed of the wave just as the wave begins to curve over and break. If all goes perfectly, you can slide down the wave and turn onto the face. More often than not, though, the wave would move on ahead of me and I'd be left behind.

Flippers help a lot to build and match speeds with the wave. One time I was at La Jolla Shores with Dewey. He gave me his flippers and I was doing well catching waves. Then he wanted to use the flippers so I went out without them. Since that made me slower I tried to compensate by pushing my board down the face of the wave to catch it. I dropped straight down the face and slammed into the sandy ocean floor. Then the "mighty" three-foot wave I was on landed on top of me almost breaking my back. Then the chaotic frenzy of the crashing wave swirled me round and round, occasionally grating me on the ocean bottom. I eventually got up sputtering water and with a sore back made my way back to the shore. I was done for the day.

More European Adventures Begin

As I moved up in the HP organization I'd be sent on trips farther away, including one that involved setting up R&D in Barcelona. I took my first trip to Barcelona in the late 1980s. My friend George Lynch was the first R&D manager of Barcelona.

My friends Ruthie and Steve VanVoorhis were already living in Barcelona and took me to a tapas bar on my first night there. (I thought Ruthie said "a topless bar," so I was a little disappointed when we arrived at a restaurant and I discovered that tapas meant small plates of food.)

Most restaurants open at 9:00 p.m., but only Americans and Germans show up before 10:00. A real night out on the town begins with tapas and drinks from 8:00 until 10:00, dinner from 10:00 to midnight, pre-club drinks from midnight to 2:00 a.m., disco from 2:00 until 5:00 or 6:00 a.m., and finally a breakfast bar until the trains start running at 7:00 a.m. to get you back home. Whew! I only did this once. It really was a taste of nightlife suitable for younger and single people.

I got a chance to go back to Barcelona after leaving HP to join ASYMTEK, a startup company (described elsewhere). Three years later I was recruited back to HP to work at the Barcelona division, a pivotal move in my life.

One of the perks of working overseas was a company car and housing subsidies and a cost-of-living allowance. Kay and I made a loop through southern Spain, Valencia, Granada, Cordoba, Sevilla, and to Tangier, Morocco and back through Madrid. Another time we looped through northern Italy hitting Milan, Florence, and Venice.

Occasionally we'd have visitors who wanted to travel, including my sister Sue and her husband Dave, who brought Mom with them. I put together a week-long itinerary to go through southern France, Switzerland, and northern Italy. No GPS or the internet or cell phones were part of travel yet, so we used guidebooks to find low-cost lodging and meals. Day one was going through Arles and Nîmes before spending a night in Avignon, France. We walked into the room that I'd picked for us. Sue took a quick look and said that we couldn't stay here. It was too small and Dave was claustrophobic. Oh, boy, I thought, we're going to be in trouble. Even so-called inexpensive rooms aren't cheap. But somehow it all worked out, and we'd ended up at the main tourist information offices for recommendations. It was a great trip.

Returning to San Diego from Barcelona began a time of great change. Not only did I cofound Musicmatch with Pam and Dennis while working at HP, but Kay and I decided to divorce and eventually I met Jane Lea. I wasn't yet done with Europe, however, or soccer and my other pursuits.

SAYING YES TO MOST EVERYTHING

Looking back, when it came to sports and travel, I rarely said no to anything. Over the years I dabbled in many activities and sports, and that often involved trips. Take snow skiing, for example. Until I got to HP the only snow sports I'd done was sledding or tobogganing. Calling what we did a sport is stretching it, however. As kids we'd tie our sleds to the back of our pickup truck and Dad drove us down the road at fifty miles an hour. How dangerous is that? And not exactly a sport. Or as a teenager, I'd hang on to a car door and slide down the road. Both dangerous and bad for our shoes.

On the other hand, moving to California and working for HP, I ended up trying out skiing. With a colleague, Jeff Baker, who'd once been a ski instructor in Breckenridge, Colorado, and Dewey Baker (not related to Jeff), I went to Big Bear to ski in 1979. I rented equipment and clumsily pushed my way into the ski lift line. I plopped into the seat, went to the top and crashed as I got off of the ski lift. Jeff was nothing but honest when he said I was a terrible skier and should keep my weight on my downhill ski. With that he said he'd see me later and took off.

This is how I attempted to discover how to ski. I'd make near parallel traverses across the slope until I had to turn. I'd shove the ski poles into the snow and wrench my body around to turn. I'd usually fall, pick myself up and proceed to traverse in the other direction. By the time I'd made it down the modest hill once or twice, Jeff returned and told me to give him my poles. "But I'll fall if I don't have them." To which he replied, "You're falling all the time anyway and you shouldn't be using them."

Jeff gave me a lesson in snow plowing which works better on gentler slopes than I was on but was still helpful. He also tried to explain twisting and tipping for turning. I was soon able to fall just as much without my poles as I had been with them!

The second time I went skiing was to Mammoth Mountain in California, a trip in which my companions were good skiers. We got onto a lift that took us to the top of the mountain and a cornice. I had no idea what a cornice was but when I looked down over the edge of it I realized that I was really out of my depth. As the rest of the group jumped off of the edge and plummeted down the slope, I began my slaloms that took me from one edge of the run to the other. That afternoon, I had my first ski lesson. I was able to learn enough to credibly get down blue (intermediate) ski runs.

The next day I was skiing down at a speed just right for me, slow and with the sun in my face. But I wasn't paying attention and before I knew it I'd skied over the back of Bill Sperry's skis! We both went down rolling, and sliding while scattering poles, skis, goggles, and gloves all over the slope. Bill came to a stop face down and not moving. I was afraid I'd killed him, but he was just dazed. He was much more careful skiing around me after that.

I never became an avid skier, but every year or two I'd ski with friends, which took me to places like Whistler in British Columbia, Canada; Heavenly Valley in Lake Tahoe, California; Tignes and Val d'Isère, and three valleys in France (Courchevel, Méribel, and Val Thorens), and some other locations.

I'd say my trip to Tignes was my most memorable ski trip. I was working for HP and living in Barcelona. Pam and Dennis Mudd and I rented rooms at the Tignes ski resort. The rooms reminded me of a honeybee hive. It was a rectangular chute for a room in a featureless building. Like most people I skied with, Pam and Dennis were better skiers, but after skiing a few days in a row, I improved significantly. Pam and Dennis liked to ski "off-piste," meaning the areas off of the groomed runs, through trees and ravines and next to cliffs.

Late one morning we found a steep ravine and stopped with our ski tips hanging over the ledge. An avalanche looked possible, not that I knew exactly what I was looking for. Dennis was determined to do it, but Pam and I skied around and down to watch him. Dennis launched off the edge and by the second turn a wall of snow broke loose behind him. By his third turn, he'd completely disappeared and a valley's worth of snow was coming down. Fortunately, we were just enough off to the side that most of the snow went by us.

When the snow stopped we looked around but didn't see Dennis. We started moving slightly up the hill and shouting his name. Within moments he popped up a hundred yards further down the hill from us. He was unhurt but had lost a glove and a ski pole. He said he felt the snow give way but he wasn't worried. He claims he heard me say in a calm voice, "There it goes." Calm is normal for me in tense situations, but perhaps he took it that if I was so calm it couldn’t possibly be too bad. So, no one was hurt and the three of us had a great story.

The next day I thought I’d mastered skiing enough, so why not try snowboarding. The lessons were held over the mountain in Val d’Isère. I rented a board and took a shuttle bus around to the other side. The lessons were held on a gentle beginner hill. In my opinion, skiing is much easier to learn than snowboarding. I’d start sliding down the hill, gathering speed until I’d have to turn. I’d usually turn up the hill, and my board would fly out from under me and I’d land on my hip. I remember one hip hurting a lot more than the other. If I leaned forward on the board a little too much, I could catch the leading edge of the board and like a mouse trap snapping shut, I’d be propelled forward and down the slope and really get clobbered.

At one point, I thought I was really getting the hang of it and decided to snowboard back to the condo. I was clumsy, though, and fell so much it turned out this wasn’t so easy after all. I ended up sore and tired.

The only other time I tried snowboarding was at Brian Head, Utah, although falling so much wore me out. When I’d had enough I slowly snowboarded at the bottom of the lift on the icy part where people walk and pack down the snow all day. The snowboard flew out in front of me and I landed on my back, and even the back of my head slammed into the icy ground. I saw stars. And that was it. From then on, I stuck to skis.

Overall, skiing took me to some beautiful places in the U.S., Canada, and the French Alps, but it never was a real passion. Later on, I was happy to sit in the lodge by the fire with Jane Lea while our daughter took ski lessons at Big Bear, California.

Pam & Dennis Mudd, and Jim.

ADVENTURES IN KAYAKING

Many types of kayaks exist. Once, for about five minutes, I got in Brian Canfield's river kayak on Kern Lake in California. That was before that lake dried up and turned into a dust bowl. Maneuverable kayaks are made for going down rivers with rapids. Just to the south of Kern Lake was the lower Kern River, where I had my most memorable white water rafting trip.

In the early 1980s my boss's boss was Al Johnson. Al was a daredevil skier and owned a big inflatable raft that held nine people. Four would sit on each side and Al would control the rudder in the back of the raft. White water rapids are classified one through six now. When we did this I thought that class five was the most extreme. Most of the rapids on the lower Kern were designated as class two, three, and four.

The nine people in the boat were all HP colleagues, including Al Johnson, Bill Sperry, and Dewey Baker. A few were speaking with some degree of dread or anticipation about an upcoming class five rapid called, "The Royal Flush." At the time the recommendation was to portage around a class five rapid. As we approached it the water's roar got louder and louder. With some difficulty we got to the side of the river just before the rapid. Our little band climbed on to some granite boulders to check it out. I don't have any pictures of the rapid, but if you Google it, you'll find photos. They don't capture how nerve wracking it looked to me, though. My thoughts differed from Al who remarked that it didn't look so bad.

I knew Al was an adrenaline junky but this sealed it. We went ahead and tackled the rapid, and Al gave us some instructions that went out the window in the first couple of seconds. I remember the water twisting and turning between a series of large boulders. In the first turn it looked to me like the whole river was running into and diving under a house sized boulder. As we were about to hit it, Dewey jumped into the center of the raft and hung on like Spider-man. The raft hit that boulder and was stuck. The water was pushing and pushing, folding the raft like a taco. After some moments the raft popped out and we were heading down to run into the next somewhat smaller boulder. Then, after an eternity that lasted maybe thirty seconds, we were free and floating down the river. Everyone stayed inside the raft. Al's attitude hadn't changed. He said again, “That wasn't so bad.” Yikes!

Most of my kayaking was done with Orange Torpedo Trips that my friend John Page organized. These trips included mostly HP colleagues like Phil Schultz, Hatem Mostafa, and Mike Palzkill but other friends were also with us on these mostly guys' trips. The Orange Torpedo is sort of a cross between an inner tube and a canoe, and, of course, it's orange. A single person sits inside with a double-ended paddle, wedging your feet into crevices on the sides to hang on. The air temperature needs to be plenty warm because we were going to get wet. We were required to wear a life vest and helmet. A medium sized rapid would produce a wild ride and likely throw us out of the kayaks.

I went on two trips on the Lower Salmon river just above where it merges into the Snake River in Idaho. Once we went to the Rogue River in Oregon. Another time we were in ocean kayaks along the Sea of California ending in La Paz, Mexico.

We did the Orange Torpedo trips in early summer before all of the mountain snow melted. We wanted plenty of water, but with warm temperatures. A large raft followed us filled with food, beer, and our gear. We'd each have a sleeping bag, pad, some warm clothes and whatever recreational items we wanted like a book or games. It was fairly luxurious camping in that someone provided all of the food and moved our stuff along.

Jim kayaking on the Lower Salmon river in Idaho.

Each day we'd be on the water by 9:00 a.m. or so, and paddle for two or three hours till lunch. Then do the same thing in the afternoon. Most of the time it was gently paddling downriver. The canyon sides were etched layers of multicolored rock. Every so often we'd go through rapids. For the biggest rapids our guides would stop us and explain our options. Rarely, we'd have to carry our kayaks around the rapids. The guides would explain how to have an exciting ride, or instead, how to have a calmer, safer passage. We'd egg each other on to try the most challenging part of the rapids. For the wildest ones, people would be on the sides trying to get pictures of spectacular rides. I've included a picture here to give an idea of what riding through the rapids was like.

I've mentioned HP in traveling and sports a lot. I've read that some corporate cultures require employees to do sporting events to further their careers. HP wasn't like that and didn't require that kind of participation. However, I was impressed that during my time there, HP hired smart dynamic people out of college and molded them into the company's unique culture. We worked hard together, but then also had fun together. I think 90 percent of the friends I developed were through HP in some way.

KICKBALL, FRISBEE, AND TRYING NEW THINGS

Ironically, one of my sports injuries came during my one season of playing kickball with Jane Lea and her Excelsior Academy teacher colleagues. I was playing in the outfield and a ball was kicked between first and second base and the outfield. I was barely able to catch the ball in the air and throw it to second base and felt some pain in my right index finger. When I looked at my right hand, that finger was bent into my palm. When I tried to straighten it, nothing happened. It turned out to be an avulsion fracture where a small chunk of bone attached to a tendon or ligament comes off. I found a popsicle stick and taped my finger to it which was practically what the doctor did when I went in the next day.

PARAGLIDING

In 1994, while working for HP in Barcelona, one of my friends, Mark Graham, who'd been paragliding all over the world urged me and some others to take a paragliding course in the Spanish Pyrenees. There are a few different ways to learn paragliding, though. For example, near my current home, paragliding is taught at the Torrey Pines glider port. Students spend days learning about the theory and practice of paragliding and must be skilled enough to control the paraglider like a kite–a challenge. But once able to do that, the person and the paraglider are ready to fly. That's not how training in paragliding was done in Spain.

On day one, my friends and I started in a gently sloping cow pasture. We laid the sail out on the ground behind us, strapped on the harness and ran down the hill. Because it didn't slope too much we couldn't get any higher than about three feet. On day two we went to a steeper pasture. Here we could get ten to twenty feet in the air. Each of us had headphones so that the instructor could give us instructions, in Spanish, as we went. Getting left and right wasn't too difficult. Pulling down the left cord puts the breaks on the left wing and you turn to the left. The opposite happens with the right. As you land you pull on both cords, which causes you to slow and stall. This is fine because you're at ground level.

Paragliders have a stall speed of about fifteen miles an hour. If you try to go slower than that, you stall, and start to drop out of the sky. It was important to start and land into the wind. If you are going into a 10-mile an hour wind, then you're only moving five miles per hour relative to the ground. That's just a fast walk.

However, landing in the direction of the wind, you'd be going faster than any of us can run and you'd likely take a tumble.

On one of my short flights, I took off and the instructors were silent. I thought, "Hey, I'm doing so well they're letting me do whatever I want." I meandered this way and that, soon headed for a barbed wire fence that I barely cleared. But I wasn't paying much attention to landing into the wind, landing hard, and tumbling. It turned out the instructors didn't trust me so much. I'd forgotten to turn on my radio! I didn't make that mistake again.

Day three we climbed up the Pyrenees to over one thousand feet in the air. We started in a small sloping clearing towards a steep face of the mountain. As before, we spread our sail out behind us. We put on the harness and then walked quickly to the face of the mountain. In the five seconds we approached the abyss an instructor judged whether or not the sail and lines were all in good shape. If a line was tangled badly you might not be able to control the paraglider, a potentially disastrous development. This was sure not how it was–or is–done in the U.S., a country full of lawyers.

I took off and the instructors didn't stop me. In an instant, or so it seemed, I was so high in the air that the ground was really small. There was a seat under me to sit on, and I was in a harness that, presumably, I couldn't get out of. To get comfortable, I needed to lean back on the seatback behind me, but for many seconds I had the strange feeling that all I could do was balance precariously on the seat. If I were to lean back I would certainly fall over backwards to my death.

Eventually, I regained my sanity and had the courage to nestle back into the seat. Once I was situated it was glorious, with the feeling I was truly flying. The instructors guided me back to the pasture where we'd trained on day one. A windsock showed us which direction to land in. It went great!

Day four was a lot like day three, except for Alan Lobban, an electrical engineer, former British paratrooper, and the best squash player at HP. On his last flight he took off as normal but immediately the paraglider turned to the left. He probably hadn't noticed that his left brake line was hung up. Logically he pulled on the right to straighten himself out but doing that caused him to stall and he began to drop! The instructors yelled into the radio to let go with the right, which he did. He stopped dropping so fast, but Alan was still turning left. This continued until he made a too-hard landing on the side of the mountain. We were relieved Alan survived, but he damaged his knee pretty badly and it needed surgery. It took a couple of years, but he went back to playing squash. As for me, I haven't been paragliding since.

AN ADVENTURE IN SKYDIVING

In around 1997, Kay gave me a present of a day's skydiving lesson at Brown Field on the U.S. border with Mexico. There are different ways to approach jumping out of a plane. Tandem is the most common, and it means the student is attached to an instructor. Sometimes a static line jump is offered where you leave the plane and the static line is automatically pulled as you fall away. The option I chose was called "accelerated" freefall. This term sounds odd if you know physics. Just falling from the sky, an object is accelerated towards the earth at 9.8 meters per second squared (9.8 m/s^2). I picture accelerated freefall as being shot out of a cannon towards the ground. Fortunately, in this case, accelerated meant doing a brief training session and jumping out of the plane unattached to anything.

Before the actual event we spent hours learning about skydiving. A lot of the training was about what can go wrong and ways to recover. The chute is packed over a spring. When you pull the ripcord, the chute bag is opened and the chute is flung out into the air. Soon after you pull the cord you look up and hope to see a nice rectangular chute above you. If instead, you see some fabric flapping in the wind, the idea is not to panic, but to pull one cord to release the main chute, then pull another cord to release the backup chute. This maneuver was drilled into us over and over again. We also practiced the move to get out of the plane. We laid on our bellies on a platform that was a couple of inches off of the ground and rolled off on command.

When our class was ready to go, we put on a jumpsuit and helmet and walked to the waiting plane. The plane took off. Soon we heard that we were at 7,000 feet, halfway to our goal. Looking down from over a mile high, the ground looked far away. I was getting a bit anxious, thinking that I might freeze and be unable to leave the plane.

As it turned out, I was the first to go. Since it was likely this was the only time I'd ever do this, I paid for a camera man to jump out of the plane with me. Two instructors also went with me. I wasn't attached to anyone, but the instructors were there to make sure I didn't go into a tumble and to remind me to pull the ripcord. First, the camera man went out and stood on a platform.

I imagined that I might not be able to jump out of the plane. But with all of the practice we did on the ground, I was out the door before I knew it. In an instant I was flying with the two instructors falling on either side of me. In too short a time, the instructors indicated that I should check the altimeter that was strapped to my wrist. It indicated 5,000 feet which meant it was time to pull the ripcord, which I promptly did. This was the most nerve-wracking point. Would the chute open? It was a tremendous relief when several seconds after pulling the ripcord, I looked up and saw a well-formed chute. After that it was the same as paragliding. I had a headset and someone on the ground who gave me instructions about navigating and landing safely. Whew. Skydiving was a great experience, but one of the few adventures I was certain I wouldn't be doing again.

Jim skydiving at Brown Field near San Diego. First and last time.

DABBLING AND MAKING CHOICES

Over the years I've had so many chances to try out sports or other activities. For example, an HP colleague invited me to join him in Aikido, a nonviolent martial art, a sport he loved. I said what the heck and joined him at a session, although I don't recall knowing the difference between Aikido and Kung Fu. But I understand that the objective in Aikido was disarming an attacker doing the minimum amount of damage. I participated in a class with thirty other participants dressed in a white gis and hakamas, except for me, who wore sweats. I found the experience enjoyable enough, but it didn't pull me to go back for another taste.

I also had the chance to play golf and could have made it a primary interest or hobby if I'd liked it enough. Golf exploded in popularity over my lifetime, going from an elite sport played at private country clubs to a game played by "ordinary" people, as well as a favorite televised event. At one time, it was a primarily male game, but a growing number of women have taken it up and women's golf tournaments are televised, too.

As for me, I've played golf only a handful of times and always as part of a social situation. The most memorable occasions were golfing with friends on the Costa Brava near Barcelona, or with guests who visited Jane Lea and me for our wedding near Marseilles. I'm usually the worst player in the group, so I'm paired with the best golfer, but that's okay. I'm with friends, so I have a good time. Besides, modern golf courses are beautifully landscaped and beer is usually involved.

One of my good friends, Dewey Baker, was an avid rock climber and it seems that every time I climbed, other than in a climbing gym, it was with him. To be a real climber and attempt difficult climbs (more than ten feet or so), I'd have had to buy elaborate equipment. Fortunately, other than a harness and shoes, Dewey provided what I needed. We usually went to Mt. Woodson to climb, but a couple of times we went farther away to Red Rocks, near Las Vegas, and once to a small remote mountain in Baja, Mexico. Another case of combining travel and sports.

I've also done some climbing in a gym in San Diego with Jane Lea or work friends, which is an efficient way to get the advantage of the exercise and have company. In a gym, you simply pick the difficulty of the climb you want and off you go. An hour later I'd be exhausted. Outdoor climbing is a bigger time commitment between the round-trip travel and setting the ropes for the climb. The excursion could take the better part of the day. On the other hand, climbing is usually done in delightful settings. Looking back, I should have smelled the roses–enjoyed those settings. But being task oriented, when the task was climbing, I wanted to climb!

Other sports came and went or were around only for a short time. Squash is a great game, but I played regularly only during the time I worked near Barcelona. Squash and racquetball have similarities, in that both involve hitting a ball with a racquet against a wall. A squash court has a tin box that runs along the bottom of the front wall. If you hit the tin, you hear a clang, and the ball is out of bounds. Dennis Mudd had found a group of British expats that played squash one evening a week at a club in Sant Cugat, the small town near our office. When he invited me to come along, I jumped at the chance. First it was something new. Second, I worked long hours. Getting to the squash court at 7PM on a Wednesday would force me to leave work earlier.

I wasn't very good at squash, but after several months I could have a competitive game against the least experienced players in the club. And, the courts were next to a pub–another chance to socialize and talk about what's going on in the world. A downside of squash involved spending time away with new friends to do something that Kay wasn't part of. It added to the strain on my marriage, already burdened by the long work hours.

Lots of people in my generation played tennis, another sport that was once dominated by an elite class of people who played at country clubs. Like golf, the sport was "democratized" to an extent when public parks and some schools added tennis courts. I played a little when we moved from Wisconsin to California for my first HP job and our apartment complex had courts, but I was never serious about the game. An HP colleague who lived in the same complex liked to play, and I managed to develop enough skill to get the ball over the net.

After that brief experience, I didn't play again until I met Jane Lea, who played with coordination and grace. We had a good time but she groused about what a hack I was. I looked bad but I'd run all over the court to get my racket on the ball and get it over the net. Still, tennis like so many other games and sports never grabbed me enough to make a commitment to it. Not like cycling or soccer.

TRAVEL, SPORTS, HEALTH, AND MAKING FRIENDS

While I'm still traveling a bit for soccer, much of my travel has changed. Instead of backpacking we now have an RV trailer to pull around and see the U.S. We've also started taking some cruises, like a month-long trip through Polynesia, New Zealand, and Australia.

In thinking back on my love of sports–and travel–I can say that I've been driven by curiosity as much as anything else, and there's a strong social draw to many of my favorite activities. In some cases, the travel resulted from my interest, especially in cycling and soccer.

Some of my interest in sports may be a rebellion against the boring nature of milking cows. I craved variety and experimentation. Since I was always a reasonably good athlete and skilled at several sports, I was like most everyone, drawn to pursue more of what led to success.

My father died of a heart attack at age sixty. Even as a young adult I became aware of the growing volume of research starting in the 1970s about building fitness and maintaining health. This kind of research dominated the headlines back then and has only increased every decade since. While it's true that I could have achieved the same level of fitness without the large investments of time and expense, or the injuries, good health was only one component. I've always enjoyed pushing myself and learning new things, but I especially enjoy doing that in the company of other people.

Nearly every sport I enjoy most includes a strong social component, which might explain why swimming is one of my least favorite sports. I never swam as part of a group. In fact, many of the most avid swimmers enjoy the solitude of the activity above all else and often swim to reach a meditative state. That's great, but it's not me.

Finally, physical activity is a well-accepted stress-management tool. And I believe soccer and cycling and those rafting trips were good for my mental health. The activity plus the company were equally important in my pursuits, and since my professional life was stressful, I welcomed the distraction, focus, and even frequent exhaustion.

If you think adventure is dangerous, try routine; it is lethal.
— Paulo Coelho

CHAPTER 12

ADVENTURES IN GENEALOGY, PART I

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.
–George Santayana

In the early 1960s, when I was around eight years old, I came across our huge Smith family Bible. About six inches thick, the lined pages in the back listed names, along with birth and death dates of relatives. My dad and my aunt's names appeared, along with my grandmother and several family members that I hadn't known. Apparently, a baby who had been my Aunt Flora lived only one year, but I'd never heard about her birth or death.

From then on, I was fascinated knowing all of these people had lived and died, but I didn't know they were connected to me. I started making what's known as a pedigree chart. These are usually made by putting your name center left on a piece of paper, with your parents added to form a branch to the right. By the time you get to your four grandparents, or certainly your eight great-grandparents, you're out of space on the right side of the paper. I imagined starting over on a new piece of paper and creating a pedigree chart for each of my four grandparents. But by this time the idea of keeping track of it all blew my mind and I set genealogy aside.

Every year we went to the annual Garman (my mother's mother) family reunion. The matriarch, Jane Rubendall Garman, was the only great-grandparent I ever had the chance to meet. She passed away before my sixth birthday. The only memory I have is a foggy one of her sitting in a rocking chair. I do recall eating a lot at our Garman reunions and having fun sampling the various potluck dishes, especially the desserts. I also had a chance to run around and play with my cousins.

My brother would tell me that so and so was my second cousin, or he'd point out a person that he said was our grand-uncle, or a first cousin once removed, or a shirttail uncle. I wondered what it all meant and how anyone could keep track of it all, but I never questioned it. Later, I learned that a host of genealogical terms exist. For example, whereas an aunt or uncle is a parent's brother or sister, a grand aunt or uncle is a grandparent's brother or sister. A first cousin once removed is a child of my first cousin. A grandchild of my first cousin was twice removed. A shirttail uncle isn't biologically related but married to my aunt.

From time to time, I'd come across research done by a distant relative, including a large volume, *The Descendants of Asa Baker*. Asa, my third great-grandfather, was born in Vermont in 1781, and he died near Durand, Illinois, which was close to where we lived. This book gave me a grasp of the way families expanded over time, especially by seeing names of all of Asa's descendants. The book at least tried to be complete and at nearly an inch thick, it probably contained thousands of names of descendants and spouses, including me. I thought that was pretty cool. More than showing my special connection with generations of people related to me to one degree or another, it imprinted the idea of family trees and made me think about the lives of my ancestors.

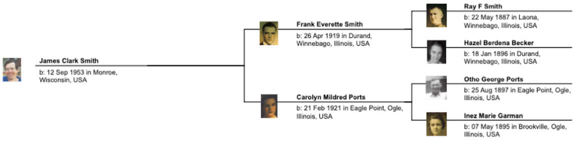
By the time I got serious about genealogy, computers and software took care of the organization. In 1995, I used my first genealogy software program, “Family Tree Maker.” Produced by Banner Blue Software, it was available on floppy disks for Windows 3.1. That program meant I could now use the names and dates listed in *The Descendants of Asa Barker*, and another book, the *Geary Family Genealogy,* and our Smith family Bible, along with other bits of information that I’d haphazardly collected over the years. Celesta Geary was my Mom’s paternal grandmother, and Eliza Barker was my father’s paternal great-grandmother.

As I delved more deeply into family history, I decided I ought to have some goals for this endeavor. First, I wanted to determine how each of my ancestors came to the United States. If I came across a Native American or African American in the tree, that would be a bonus. As it turned out, computers became my companions in my genealogy project. As I progressed in my genealogical research and found what others had done and left behind, I decided that my genealogy and this book (or what I’m writing this instant) would be a work that others could discover in years to come.

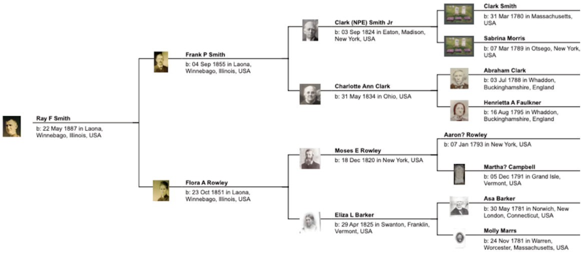
In the late 1990s, familysearch.org and ancestry.com were coming online. They tapped into an already existing interest in genealogy and created new customers, who discovered genealogy for the first time. As I write this today, television and print ads for several companies that offer genealogy resources and DNA testing pop up everywhere.

We can attribute much of the spike in interest in the late 1990s to internet speeds that started to bump up from 56k baud modems. For reasons connected to my job, HP had an ISDN line installed in my San Marcos home, so I could get a blazing fast 200k bits/second download.

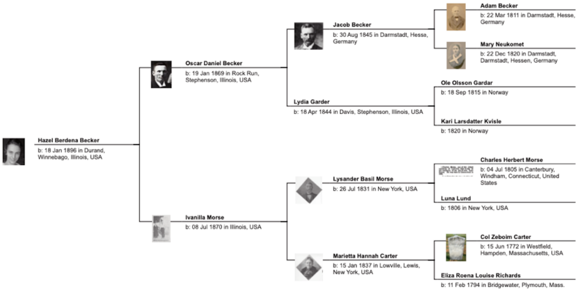
So, computer speed also coincided with an incredible amount of information becoming available online. For example, the 1920 census and earlier versions were coming online. For privacy reasons, we have a federal law that calls for the release of each census seventy-two years after it is taken. That meant I was able to look up my father and grandparents in the 1920 census. It gets even cooler. When you find a person, you also see every member of the household for all censuses starting in 1850. So, if I see my father as a one year old and there are a couple of people in the household that are thirty years old, you can surmise they are his parents. With luck and good census data, it is possible to construct your family tree back to your sixteen second great-grandparents, or maybe one more generation if you're lucky. As you can see in the tree below, several of the second great-grandparents would be small children living at home at the time of the 1850 census.


James Clark Smith
b: 12 Sep 1953 in Monroe, Wisconsin, USA
Frank Everette Smith
b: 26 Apr 1919 in Durand, Winnebago, Illinois, USA
Carolyn Mildred Ports
b: 21 Feb 1921 in Eagle Point, Ogle, Illinois, USA
Ray F Smith
b: 22 May 1887 in Laona, Winnebago, Illinois, USA
Hazel Berdena Becker
b: 18 Jan 1896 in Durand, Winnebago, Illinois, USA
Otho George Ports
b: 25 Aug 1897 in Eagle Point, Ogle, Illinois, USA
Inez Marie Garman
b: 07 May 1895 in Brookville, Ogle, Illinois, USA

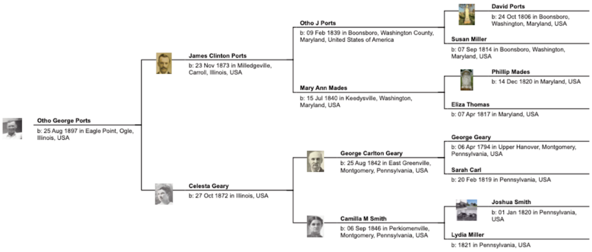
Jim's parents and grandparents.


Ray F Smith
b: 22 May 1887 in Laona, Winnebago, Illinois, USA
Frank P Smith
b: 04 Sep 1855 in Laona, Winnebago, Illinois, USA
Flora A Rowley
b: 23 Oct 1851 in Laona, Winnebago, Illinois, USA
Clark (NPE) Smith Jr
b: 03 Sep 1824 in Eaton, Madison, New York, USA
Charlotte Ann Clark
b: 31 May 1834 in Ohio, USA
Moses E Rowley
b: 18 Dec 1820 in New York, USA
Eliza L Barker
b: 29 Apr 1825 in Swanton, Franklin, Vermont, USA
Clark Smith
b: 31 Mar 1780 in Massachusetts, USA
Sabrina Morris
b: 07 Mar 1789 in Otsego, New York, USA
Abraham Clark
b: 03 Jul 1788 in Whaddon, Buckinghamshire, England
Henrietta A Faulkner
b: 16 Aug 1795 in Whaddon, Buckinghamshire, England
Aaron? Rowley
b: 07 Jan 1793 in New York, USA
Martha? Campbell
b: 05 Dec 1791 in Grand Isle, Vermont, USA
Asa Barker
b: 30 May 1781 in Norwich, New London, Connecticut, USA
Molly Marrs
b: 24 Nov 1781 in Warren, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA

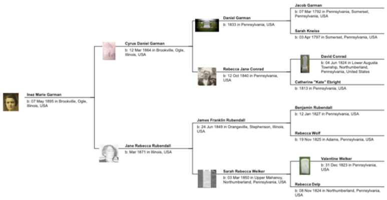
Paternal grandfather Ray Smith ancestors.


Hazel Berdena Becker
b: 18 Jan 1896 in Durand, Winnebago, Illinois, USA
Oscar Daniel Becker
b: 19 Jan 1869 in Rock Run, Stephenson, Illinois, USA
Ivanilla Morse
b: 08 Jul 1870 in Illinois, USA
Jacob Becker
b: 30 Aug 1845 in Darmstadt, Hesse, Germany
Lydia Garder
b: 18 Apr 1844 in Davis, Stephenson, Illinois, USA
Lysander Basil Morse
b: 26 Jul 1831 in New York, USA
Marietta Hannah Carter
b: 15 Jan 1837 in Lowville, Lewis, New York, USA
Adam Becker
b: 22 Mar 1811 in Darmstadt, Hesse, Germany
Mary Neukomet
b: 22 Dec 1820 in Darmstadt, Darmstadt, Hessen, Germany
Ole Olsson Gardar
b: 18 Sep 1815 in Norway
Kari Larsdatter Kvisle
b: 1820 in Norway
Charles Herbert Morse
b: 04 Jul 1805 in Canterbury, Windham, Connecticut, United States
Luna Lund
b: 1806 in New York, USA
Col Zeboim Carter
b: 15 Jun 1772 in Westfield, Hampden, Massachusetts, USA
Eliza Roena Louise Richards
b: 11 Feb 1794 in Bridgewater, Plymouth, Mass.

Paternal grandmother Hazel Becker ancestors.

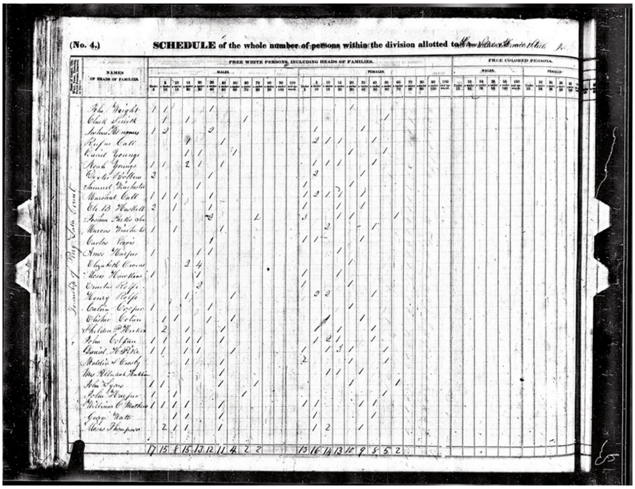

Otho George Ports
b: 25 Aug 1897 in Eagle Point, Ogle, Illinois, USA
James Clinton Ports
b: 23 Nov 1873 in Milledgeville, Carroll, Illinois, USA
Celesta Geary
b: 27 Oct 1872 in Illinois, USA
Otho J Ports
b: 09 Feb 1839 in Boonsboro, Washington County, Maryland, United States of America
Mary Ann Mades
b: 15 Jul 1840 in Keedysville, Washington, Maryland, USA
George Carlton Geary
b: 25 Aug 1842 in East Greenville, Montgomery, Pennsylvania, USA
Camilla M Smith
b: 06 Sep 1846 in Perkiomenville, Montgomery, Pennsylvania, USA
David Ports
b: 24 Oct 1806 in Boonsboro, Washington, Maryland, USA
Susan Miller
b: 07 Sep 1814 in Boonsboro, Washington, Maryland, USA
Phillip Mades
b: 14 Dec 1820 in Maryland, USA
Eliza Thomas
b: 07 Apr 1817 in Maryland, USA
George Geary
b: 06 Apr 1794 in Upper Hanover, Montgomery, Pennsylvania, USA
Sarah Carl
b: 20 Feb 1819 in Pennsylvania, USA
Joshua Smith
b: 01 Jan 1820 in Pennsylvania, USA
Lydia Miller
b: 1821 in Pennsylvania, USA

Maternal grandfather Otho Ports ancestors.


Inez Marie Garman
b: 07 May 1895 in Brookville, Ogle, Illinois, USA
Cyrus Daniel Garman
b: 12 Mar 1864 in Brookville, Ogle, Illinois, USA
Jane Rebecca Rubendall
b: Mar 1871 in Illinois, USA
Daniel Garman
b: 1833 in Pennsylvania, USA
Rebecca Jane Conrad
b: 12 Oct 1840 in Pennsylvania, USA
James Franklin Rubendall
b: 24 Jun 1849 in Orangeville, Stephenson, Illinois, USA
Sarah Rebecca Welker
b: 03 Mar 1850 in Upper Mahanoy, Northumberland, Pennsylvania, USA
Jacob Garman
b: 07 Mar 1792 in Pennsylvania, Somerset, Pennsylvania, USA
Sarah Kneiss
b: 03 Apr 1797 in Somerset, Pennsylvania, USA
David Conrad
b: 04 Jun 1824 in Lower Augusta Township, Northumberland, Pennsylvania, United States
Catherine "Kate" Ebright
b: 1813 in Pennsylvania, USA
Benjamin Rubendall
b: 12 Jan 1827 in Pennsylvania, USA
Rebecca Wolf
b: 19 Nov 1825 in Adams, Pennsylvania, USA
Valentine Welker
b: 31 Dec 1823 in Pennsylvania, USA
Rebecca Delp
b: 08 Nov 1824 in Northumberland, Pennsylvania, USA

Maternal grandmother Inez Garman ancestors.

Censuses before 1850 are more challenging to use. The census only named the person who was deemed "head of the household" at that time. That meant other men, women, and enslaved individuals were only a tick mark or number. Below is an example of the 1840 census. My third great-grandfather Clark Smith was in Perry, Ohio, at the time.



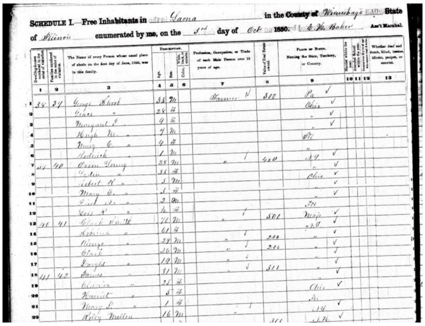
(No. 4.) SCHEDULE of the whole number of persons within the division allotted to

FREE WHITE PERSONS, INCLUDING HEADS OF FAMILIES. FREE COLORED PERSONS.

NAMES OF HEADS OF FAMILIES.

Example pre-1850 census. Head of household only.

Compare that to the much better 1850 census below. My third great-grandfather is listed with his wife and three of his sons. Next door is his oldest son, James, with his wife and children. One daughter who was married earlier is missing.



SCHEDULE I.—Free Inhabitants in Lama in the County of Winnebago State of Illinois enumerated by me, on the 3rd day of Oct 1850. E. W. Baker Ass't Marshal.

	Dwelling-houses numbered in the order of visitation.	Families numbered in the order of visitation.	The Name of every Person whose usual place of abode on the first day of June, 1850, was in this family.	Description. Age.	Sex.	Color, white, black, or mulatto.	Profession, Occupation, or Trade of each Male Person over 15 years of age.	Value of Real Estate owned.	Place of Birth. Naming the State, Territory, or Country.	Married within the year.	Attended School within the year.	Persons over 20 y'rs of age who cannot read & write.	Whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper, or convict.
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	38	39	George Short	33	M		Farmer	300	Pa				
2			Grace "	28	F				Ohio				
3			Margaret J. "	9	F				"				
4			Hugh M. "	7	M				"				
5			Mary C. "	4	F				Ill				
6			Roderick "	1	M				"				
7	39	40	Orrin Young	28	M		"	400	N.Y.				
8			Lydia "	33	F				"				
9			Robert R. "	5	M				Ohio				
10			Mary E. "	3	F				"				
11			Fred A. "	2	M				"				
12			Lois R. "	½	F				Ill				
13	40	41	Clark Smith	70	M		"	500	Mass				
14			Sabrina "	61	F				N.Y.				
15			Alonzo "	29	M		"	200	"				
16			Clark "	26	M		"	200	"				
17			Dwight "	19	M		"		"				
18	41	42	James "	31	M		"	311	"				
19			Clarissa "	25	F				"				
20			Harriet "	5	F				Ohio				
21			Mary L. "	1	F				Ill				
22			Riley Mullen	16	M		"		N.Y.				

Example 1850 census. Includes all family members.

By the early 2000s, Ancestry.com had over one billion records.

Now they have more than *30* billion. These records include, censuses, births, deaths, marriages, the Social Security Death Index, immigration records, family stories, photos, and much more.

Around the same time, ancestry.com started allowing people to search other people's trees. If you found someone that you thought was related to you, you could quickly add them, which allows users to grow their tree rapidly. While many like this feature, serious genealogists hate it. It spawns huge numbers of cut and pasted trees with erroneous entries. This is why I use other people's trees carefully. I love it when I find old photos or other relevant documents attached to trees. Many of these documents would be hidden if genealogists didn't attach them to their trees. The internet and these online records have helped immensely in filling out my family tree.

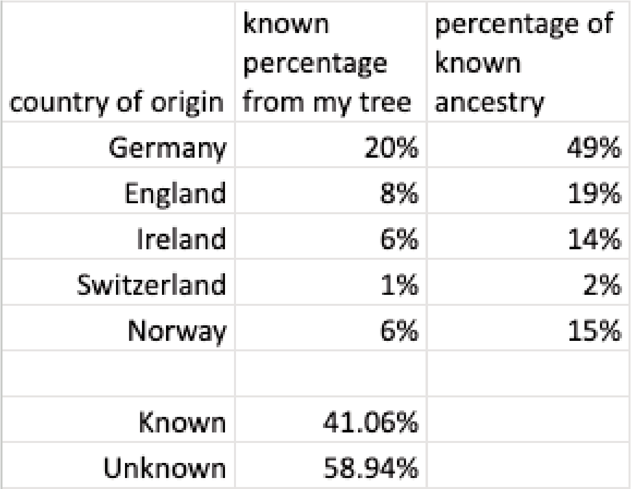
Originally, genealogy involved traveling to county seats, for example, and by consulting other archives like the collections compiled by the Mormon Church. Because of beliefs within the Mormon religion, the church has a long tradition of keeping family records that have served generations of genealogists. I've done more than a dozen genealogical research trips, usually tagged onto a trip I was going to make anyway. While my son was living in Salt Lake City, I'd visit him and also check out the Morman genealogy Family History Library, arguably the biggest in the world. https://www.familysearch.org/family-history-library/welcome-to-the-family-history-library

During family visits in Illinois, I've stopped at the Winnebago County Courthouse in Rockford. I've gone to all of the cemeteries within Winnebago, Stephenson, and Ogle counties where I've suspected my ancestors could be buried.

Unfortunately, traditional genealogical research is a lot like looking for a needle in a haystack. Sure, I know people have made great discoveries this way, but it takes a lot of time. Some records will never be available online, so bless the souls that go out and do the foot research. For the most part, though, I’m sticking with the computer.

At this point my tree has almost five thousand names in it, over seven hundred photos and eighty stories. Even with all of those names I’m still far from my goal of knowing how my ancestors got here. I’ve accounted for about 40 percent.

Note that from my tree I've only identified less than half of where my ancestors originated.



country of origin	known percentage from my tree	percentage of known ancestry
Germany	20%	49%
England	8%	19%
Ireland	6%	14%
Switzerland	1%	2%
Norway	6%	15%
Known	41.06%	
Unknown	58.94%	

I’ve got over 5,000 names in my family tree but only traced 41 percent back to a country of origin.

In my case, the problem is that my relatives arrived a long time ago. The latest arrival to the U.S., in 1847, was my second great-grandfather, Jacob Becker, born in Germany. He married Lydia Garder, whose parents were both born in Norway. I can say I’m 100 percent sure where my great-grandfather, Oscar Becker, came from. However, since I have eight great-grandparents, that only accounts for 12.5 percent. Even if I find a fourth great-grandparent's arrival information, it only adds 1.5 percent. The further back in time they arrived, the less information is added to the total. However, through this process, I found a relative who arrived on the Mayflower.

My biggest brick wall is at my third great-grandfather, Clark Smith Senior. He was born in 1780, probably in Massachusetts, but perhaps, New York, and with a slim chance he was actually born in Pennsylvania. This uncertainty exists because records put his birth in all three locations. I hired a genealogist who found documentation of him being on a farm in Madison County, New York, in 1810. From 1810 to his death in 1852 in Leona, Illinois, I have documented his location for every ten years. Before that, I can't say. I've put Clark Smith on the back burner for now. With the introduction of DNA genealogy, I'm not sure we are biologically related. (More on DNA genealogy later.)

At one time I gave a quest to a friend and genealogist, Karen Stansbury. My maternal surname is Ports, and I was stuck at my fourth great-grandfather Johan Ports. I found him through the Pioneer Letters, a transcript of which is in the Lincoln Library in Springfield, Illinois. Through clever online searches Karen made great progress in only a couple weeks. In old local newspapers, she discovered that one uncle was placed in a mental institution, while another killed himself playing with fireworks. The best discovery was that a sixth cousin, Michael Ports, had written a series of articles for the Maryland Historical Society. My Ports ancestors had lived in Washington County, Maryland, until 1860. From these newspaper articles I discovered that my fifth great-grandfather Johan Philip Ports was born in Germany around 1730.

In 2012, on a quest for old photos, I drove from Elmhurst, Illinois, to Cleveland, Ohio, where my dad's first cousin Marge Sersig lived. Marge was going through the early stages of Alzheimer's, but she lived alone and was very helpful in digging out a stack of old family photos. I'd taken a laptop computer and scanner with me.

One of many prizes was a photo of Lysander Morse, my second great-grandfather, born in 1831.

Because relatives know I collect such things, my cousin Doug Curtis, located in Louisville, sent a stack of letters written by my Grandma Hazel. I learned that Grandma Hazel followed my Grandpa Ray, who died before I was born, to his WWI training location in San Francisco, where they were married. Later, Ray was an Army cook in France. Hazel petitioned the U.S. Army to let Ray out early because she was having a difficult pregnancy with my dad. Included in this cache of information was the paper trail of the Army's decision process. In the end they rejected the request.

I've spent thousands of hours and dollars on my genealogy. For me it has been worth it, because I like solving puzzles and genealogy is a big one. I get a thrill out of finding a new story, photo or relative. Besides discovering ancestors, my research has allowed me to connect with many living relatives. I haven't found anything like African American or Native American relatives. My relatives arrived before the mid-1800s from northwestern Europe.

CHAPTER 13

ADVENTURES IN GENEALOGY AND DNA, PART 2

> Once a new technology rolls over you, if you're not part of the steamroller, you're part of the road.
>
> —Stewart Brand

The beginnings of the field of knowledge we now call DNA genealogy coincide with the year I was born, 1953. Coincidentally, well-known DNA scientists, Francis Crick and James Watson, with critical help from Rosalind Franklin, discovered the structure of DNA that year. Fast forward to 2000, and we see President Bill Clinton, along with Francis Collins and Craig Venter, announce that the first draft of the human genome was complete. Since then, that draft has been tweaked quite a bit. Then, in 2021 the Telomere-to-Telomere (T2T)Consortium announced that the gaps had finally been filled in. Of course, that won't be the last word.

In addition, in 2000, the Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation (SMGF) announced a plan to link DNA and genealogy. The process involved taking a blood sample and what information we have about our genealogy. I went to the SMGF lab in Provo, Utah, to give them a bit of my blood and a floppy disk containing what I'd learned about my family tree to that point. As an aside, this was when the age of floppy disks was ending and just before USB flash drives replaced them and were in common use.

Eventually SMGF was purchased by ancestry.com and shut down in 2015 amid a bit of controversy. An article appeared in the *New Orleans Advocate* about ancestry.com working with the police, using the SMGF database to investigate a murder. That threw shade on Ancestry's privacy policy and caused a sensation of sorts in the world of genealogy. Ultimately, the suspect was exonerated. Ancestry was shown to have followed a court order and didn't violate their privacy policy. But their reputation was damaged and they closed the database.

DNA BASICS

A short DNA primer is in order. For genealogy, we're interested in the three main types of DNA. The first and least useful is mitochondrial DNA. Outside of the nucleus of each of our cells we have many small loops of DNA in the mitochondria, our body's powerhouse. The loops are tiny, less than seventeen thousand nucleotides long. Nucleotides are an essential chemical compound in DNA and come in four flavors: A, T, G, or C. Over a billion years ago mitochondria were standalone bacteria. At some point a cell engulfed a mitochondrial cell and the resulting chimera was improved.

The mitochondria have a very efficient process to convert sugars to ATP (Adenosine Triphosphate). ATP is the fundamental molecule that powers most actions in the body, like the contraction of a muscle molecule. Men and women have mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) but we inherit them only from our mothers. The man's mtDNA is concentrated in the tail of the sperm, which doesn't enter the egg during fertilization and is discarded.

We don't all have the exact same mtDNA, because of random mutations in our ancestors. Researchers have worked out that we are all descended from a single female one hundred thousand to two hundred thousand years ago. Mitochondrial Eve! It's an intriguing proposition but isn't especially useful to genealogists. Two people can have the exact same mtDNA but share a grandmother hundreds of generations in the past. So, it is not usually helpful for me.

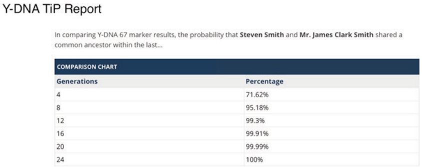
YDNA, based on the Y chromosome, is more useful. We each have twenty-three pairs of chromosomes in the nucleus of each of our cells. One half of the pair is from Dad, the other from Mom. The twenty-third pair are the sex chromosomes X and Y. Men inherit a Y from their father and an X from their mother. Women get an X from both parents. So, a man has the same Y as his dad and his dad, and so on back through the generations. Since the Y chromosome stays the same, except for rare mutations, you and a fourth cousin from the same line of men might have an identical Y chromosome. (The Y chromosome has the fewest genes. Really just two: maleness and one that causes a man to refuse to ask for directions when lost:)

The Y chromosome comes from a man's father, who got it from his father and so on. At some point in our distant past, there was a Y Adam, the man who carried the Y chromosome that all extant men are descended from. He wasn't the only man at that time and he didn't live at the same time or place as the mtDNA Eve. Estimates of when he lived range from two hundred thousand to 3.5 million years ago.

The Y chromosome has 60 million base pairs instead of the seventeen thousand of mtDNA. Therefore, the branching on the Y family tree is much more detailed. Two men with the exact same Y chromosome have a chance of being able to find out how they're related.

There are so many Smiths out there in the world, but I can explain how we're related only to my brother and our sons. For years, on Ftdna.com (Family Tree DNA, a private company), my closest Y match and I shared a common ancestor about two thousand years ago. Then around 2015, a man named Steven Smith became my new closest match. The common Y DNA test uses STRs (short tandem repeats). Many people will start with a lower quality, lower cost test of thirty-seven markers. That is the test Steven took and we were a distance of two apart. We knew we weren't related within four generations because of our genealogy research.

I emailed Steven and he agreed to take a more accurate test of sixty-seven markers. Surprisingly, we were the same distance apart with the more accurate test, which increased the odds we are related within genealogical time, meaning within fifteen generations or about three hundred years. Now according to Ftdna, we had a 95 percent chance of being related within eight generations. Iain McDonald (see below) has researched this and claims Ftdna is too optimistic, however.



Y-DNA TiP Report

In comparing Y-DNA 67 marker results, the probability that **Steven Smith** and **Mr. James Clark Smith** shared a common ancestor within the last...

COMPARISON CHART

Generations	Percentage
4	71.62%
8	95.18%
12	99.3%
16	99.91%
20	99.99%
24	100%

Comparing the differences in my Y Chromosome to my closest match, Steven Smith. I know we aren't related within 4 generations and our genealogy records don't go back 8 generations, so we don't know how we are related.

Then because I'm into this stuff, I asked him to have his Y chromosome sequenced, which means determining each letter at every position. I'd already had my whole genome sequenced as part of the

Personal Genome Project, run by Harvard professor George Church. For this step, Steven and I used fullgenomes.com, which had the most detailed sequencing of the Y chromosome at the time.

I shared the results of the full genome sequencing with Dr. Iain MacDonald, a Scottish astrophysicist turned genetic genealogist. He'd been researching a branch of the Y chromosome that he calls the King's Cluster, of which I'm a part. (The King's Cluster includes the House of Wettin, which is an ancestral house of several European royal families, including the British House of Windsor, according to anthrogenica.com.)

I wanted Iain to verify that Steven was also part of our group and more importantly, how closely are we related. It turns out we are both part of the group and we are different by eight mutations. Because there are estimates of how long it takes for a mutation to occur, Iain estimated that Steven and I shared a common grandfather between three hundred and five hundred years ago, or someone born in 1650 back to 1450. Since my Smith tree is determined back to Clark Smith, born in 1780, I'd have to find relatives back another four or more generations. Oh well, I'm still stuck.

My last mtDNA and Y chromosome project was to test someone who had the same version of the aforementioned DNA in each of my eight great-grandparents. Of my four great-grandfathers, Smith, Becker, Ports, and Garman, I have the same Y chromosome as, unless there was a mutation, all of my Smith forefathers. One down, three to go.

Every year my mother would have us go to the Garman reunion. The biggest genealogist there is my second cousin, Ed Garman. When I told him about my project, he mentioned having been tested and gave me his result. I'd never been to a Ports reunion, but my mother went to that family reunion in Polo, Illinois, every year. In 2014, I took a DNA test kit and joined my mother at the reunion. After all of the deviled eggs and fried chicken had been eaten, I introduced myself to my third cousin, Perry Ports, who agreed to be tested. On the spot I was able to take his DNA sample by swabbing his cheek.

The Becker family connection was a little more difficult. My closest Becker relatives were women, thus, no Y chromosome. I scoured my family tree looking for a male Becker, one who was both living and willing. I located Raymond Becker (second cousin twice removed), born in 1924 and living in Iowa. Fortunately, his daughter was an avid genealogist and happy to work with me. I sent a test kit to her and she got a sample from her dad. So, great-grandfathers' Y chromosome, check.

My mtDNA is the same as my mother's and her mother's. So that takes care of my great-grandmother Rebecca Jane Rubendall Garman. My first cousin, Don Curtis, provided a sample, which gave me my great-grandmother, Ivanilla Morse Becker. My mom's first cousin, Dorothy Garman, took the test, which gave me my great-grandmother Celesta Geary Ports' mtDNA. My last one is great-grandmother Flora Rowley Smith, who had no surviving descendants with her mtDNA. I checked her mother, Erixna Barker, for descendants, but couldn't find any that would work for me. So, I moved up to her mother, Molly Marrs, born in 1781, my third great-grandmother.

Through a genealogical search I went down generation after generation of daughters until I found Henry Anton Jr, my fourth cousin, living in Pueblo, Colorado. It's hard to find the names of living relatives, and Ancestry.com won't show them. I usually look for an obituary of a parent, which often lists surviving children, sometimes with a location. Once I have a name I use a person-search tool like Spokeo.com to get a phone number. After all of that, I cold-called Henry and told him I was his fourth cousin and a genealogist. After some chitchat, I talked about my project and he agreed to be tested!

When I tested Henry Anton's mtDNA, I got a result, but what if he isn't even related to me? I did the paper genealogy research that said he was my fourth cousin and our common ancestor was Molly Marrs. But mistakes happen. Sometimes there's an adoption that isn't recorded. Or maybe there was infidelity, and the father isn't who everyone thought he was. These are sometimes called NPEs, Non-Paternity Events or Not Parent Expected. So, I also tested his atDNA (explained later) at the same time. The atDNA allows me, within limits, to determine if and how closely we are related. All checked out fine in Henry's case.

All of this took about two years of work. So, what did it tell me? Nothing useful, but still, some interesting bits for a geek. All of the men were R1b, a common European haplotype (think of this as a branch of a family tree). The R1b group arose about eighteen thousand years ago in western Eurasia. That isn't very specific. The mtDNA haplogroups were K, H, and V. They are common in Europe with a common ancestor within the last forty thousand years.

For a genealogist, the most useful testing is autosomal or atDNA. As I've mentioned, we have twenty-three pairs of chromosomes. One through twenty-two are the autosomal chromosomes. The twenty-third pair are the X and Y, which determine sex. The chromosomes we get from our parents are composed of approximately half from our father and half from our mother. The measurement unit for DNA sharing is the centimorgan (cM). We get a bit over 3,000 cM from each parent. A first cousin is likely to share about eight hundred with us, but the sharing can range from 400 to 1,400 cM. For each cousin more distantly removed, the likely sharing drops by one fourth. By just our third cousin, the range is from 0 to 234 cM. Yes, it is possible that we share zero DNA with our third cousin!

I started out testing at Ftdna.com, a company that appeared early in this DNA testing market. It's the only company I knew of that tested Y, mtDNA, and atDNA. It also was one of the few places that used a cheek swab, the easier method of taking a sample, especially for older folks. I tested a lot of my relatives on Ftdna because it was what I was familiar with. However, these days I recommend DNA testing at 23andMe or Ancestry depending on what the goal is. Both 23andMe and Ancestry collect a tube of spit, which was challenging for my ninety-year-old mother.

In 2007, 23andMe introduced direct-to-consumer atDNA, the first company to do so. Their focus was on health, so if that's important to you, start there. When I got my DNA health report, there was a long list of illnesses that didn't seem serious or interesting. But at the top was a button and a warning about my APOE test. The warning isn't meant to freak out the customer, but if you are the worrying kind, don't click on the button because you could get news you don't want.

In my usual spirit of "how bad could it be?" I clicked. To explain, APOE is the gene most linked to Alzheimer's disease, and most individuals are APOE3/3. This means they have the same version 3 from both parents, which leaves them with the "standard" chance of developing Alzheimer's disease. I have APOE3/4, and later I learned that I inherited the 4 from Dad. This doubles or triples my chance of developing Alzheimer's. On the bright side, I have an 80 percent chance of not getting it, but still…

In 2010, 23andMe had tested 10 million people, the second largest number in the DNA testing business, and the company remains the second most useful for genealogy. I've tested Mom, my siblings, and a few others on this site.

I viewed my APOE status as another reminder to take care of my health. Since my father died of a heart attack right after his sixtieth birthday, I'd already become health conscious. Although to date, no particularly effective treatment for Alzheimer's disease exists, a heart-healthy diet is good for the likely cause of my demise. I like the efficiency of having a diet which is good for my heart as well as for my brain. This information has also led me to read the latest Alzheimer’s news and enroll in an Alzheimer's registry. This is part of the reason I want to write down my story now, while I can.

For some, testing can expand horizons, not only in terms of realizing the vast numbers of people who are likely distant DNA relatives, but also in being part of the growing body of knowledge about diseases and health. It could lead to participating in clinical research. For example, in late 2018, I began enrollment in a Novartis BACE1 inhibitor, run by Pacific Research Network. To be enrolled you had to be APOE3/4, like me, and have amyloid plaque buildup on your brain. Fortunately, I failed the PET scan, which showed no plaque buildup. Of course, it’s good to be rejected for a study because you don’t meet clinical criteria. My results meant that I should be Alzheimer’s disease free for the next ten years! I was curiously disappointed not to get into the trial, but also appreciated the reassuring reason I failed.

Until you send a sharing request, 23andMe limits the amount of information shared with your cousins. Their system involves at least three mouse clicks, not so bad in itself, but you might have two thousand matches. I wrote a short program to automate this process. The author, AJ Jacobs, learned about my routine and asked if he could use it. At the time, he was writing his book, *It’s all Relative* (Simon & Schuster 2017), about the ways in which we’re all related. He told me later that my program worked great, and as far as I know he and I are the only two people who used the program.

As I mentioned, 23andMe has a big health focus and attracts customers because of it. The company makes much of its money by selling (anonymous) data to drug companies. Their DNA testing provides users’ genotype, approximately their genetic code. Then they encourage their users to fill out health surveys. This is one's physical characteristics, or phenotype.

Inevitably, the issues of information privacy and anonymity come up, along with concerns about what could happen to the data, maybe not for today, but at some point in the future. The question comes up about what could happen to the data, if not today then at some point in the future. Although I understand the reason for these concerns, I don't worry about privacy too much. On the positive side, I enjoy the idea of helping to advance health research, so I've filled out dozens of their questionnaires.

One questionnaire includes fifty questions, one of which was on male reproductive health. My son is a professor of male reproductive health at the University of California San Francisco (UCSF), and I've talked with him about doing an analysis of 23andMe data. This kind of project might have important implications. For example, a typical medical diagnostic test costs several hundred dollars, but wouldn't it be interesting if a $99 test could deliver the needed data just as well? One of my son's colleagues, a bioinformatics professor, was also interested. She contacted 23andMe and found that over fifty thousand men had filled out the survey and been DNA tested, a big dataset. Unfortunately, she left UCSF before starting, and the idea is still in the deep freezer. These days, testing one's whole genome can be done for around $100.

If your main goal is ancestry, then the place to start is DNA testing at ancestry.com. As of 2020, they claim to have over 18 million tests sold. Based on my interests, I spend more time on ancestry.com because many more genealogists are on the site and they tend to respond more frequently to inquiries. It's frustrating when you think someone may have a clue but won't respond to messages.

A sizable minority of test takers are trying to find out who their parents or grandparents are. Usually, we are too distantly related for me to be of specific help, but I have several suggestions to aid their search. In one case, a woman named Marikay contacted me. She shared quite a lot of DNA with me, enough that we were about second cousins or so. She knew her mother, but was looking for her grandmother, who she thought might have been in the Dixon, Illinois, area.

From the DNA I could tell Marikay and I were related on my mom's side and her family was concentrated just north of Dixon. I'd also heard a story that Mom's first cousin Dorothy had given up a child or two for adoption before she was married. Furthermore, I'd DNA tested Dorothy as part of my mtDNA project. I knew Dorothy's daughter Pauline, so I asked for her family tree because I'm a genealogist. She provided me with a detailed tree and lo and behold, Marikay is on her list! Next I told Pauline that her niece, or actually half niece, was looking for her family. Pauline agreed to talk to Marikay's mother. (Pauline's half-sister and Dorothy's daughter). A week later, Pauline told me that Marikay's mother said, "Don't tell her [Marikay] anything".

After much internal debate, I decided that it was up to Dorothy to decide if she wanted to be in contact with her granddaughter, Marikay. I spoke with my mother, who agreed to discuss it with Dorothy at their semi-annual lunch. For a couple of years, I'd ask my mom if she brought up the subject with Dorothy, but it was never, "the right time." Then in 2016, Mom passed away, followed by Dorothy in 2018. But, as a post note, it looks like Marikay knows who her grandmother was.

I've helped a couple of adoptees get connected with biological relatives and even met one. I've exchanged stories, vital records, and old photos with many DNA cousins. It isn't a quick and easy process but for the times it does work, I find it useful.

Another project has been to use DNA to verify my family tree. Let's say I test a first cousin on my mom's side and we share about

800 cM. That isn't proof, but it is good enough for me to know who my maternal grandparents are. Testing the right two first cousins verifies both pairs of grandparents, then the correct four second cousins verify my four pairs of great-grandparents and so on.

My dad's side has been harder, first because his ancestors had relatively fewer children than my mom's side. For example, my paternal grandfather had just one sister and she had no children, so no second cousin exists to verify that pair of great-grandparents, Frank and Flora Rowley Smith. One generation up is Clark and Charlotte Clark Smith. Through a lot of digging, I found a third cousin, Martha Vansickle Baur, and she agreed to be tested. We share DNA but only 17 cM, which gives me an 8 percent chance of actually being a third cousin, according to the DNA painter website. Fortunately, I've tested my three siblings, who all share more DNA with Martha. So, I'd say my paternal second great-grandparents are verified with an asterisk.

Then the next level up with my third great-grandparents, Clark and Sabrina Morse Smith, I really go off the rails. They had several children. I found a fourth cousin, Dorothy Brandner, to test. She is descended under Clark Junior's sister Mary. Neither Dorothy nor any of her close relatives in my branch match me or my siblings. So, either there is a DNA break at that level, or I have bad luck. Between two fourth cousins, there is about a 50 percent chance of sharing no DNA. But when one has tested as many people as I have, the chance is not zero, but pretty low, that we aren't biologically related. To narrow this down, one of my projects is to find and, I hope, test a third cousin of Dorothy, who is a fourth cousin to me.

I've since convinced myself that Clark Smith Jr was not the father of his son Frank Smith. The final piece was seeing that my siblings and I all matched our third cousin, Martha Baur, through Clark Smith's wife, but not him. So, Martha is my half third cousin which better matches the amount of DNA that we share.

Earlier, I mentioned that I'm not particularly worried about privacy. Here's why. If we use a cell phone and the internet we've given up a chunk of privacy. If I do a Google search for a product, ads for similar products pop up as I go to a range of websites. I've been a long-time member of the PGP (Personal Genome Project). This group goes to great lengths to show that even if a DNA testing company promises privacy, it's a mirage. To demonstrate, at a conference, a researcher asked me to enter my zip code, age, and gender into a webpage. Based on that little bit of information, it found James Smith from my voter registration! Here are some concerns and my thoughts about DNA testing concerns. As you can see, some of these areas remain murky:

- You may be denied employment based on your DNA test. GINA (Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act), passed in 2009, protects an individual against employment discrimination based on a DNA test, but a sneaky employer may get around this somehow. Since I'm retired this wasn't relevant to me, but it could be to others.
- You may be denied health care coverage based on your DNA test. GINA to the rescue again. However, with the ACA (Affordable Care Act, but known as Obama Care), preexisting conditions can't be used to deny health insurance to individuals.
- Because you took the test, a relative who committed a crime and left DNA evidence, may be caught. The Golden State Killer was caught by the police using GEDmatch, a database that I'm in, to find a relative that tested. If a third cousin or closer to me left DNA evidence, it wouldn't take a police investigator too long to find him or her. I believe that's the accused's

problem. Don’t do the crime if you don’t want to do the time.
- Some fear that even though they take a DNA test anonymously, their real identity will be revealed. This is a real concern, but with a name like Jim Smith, I have inherent anonymity. I also don’t think my life would be that interesting to a criminal.

Of course, there are people who fear that DNA testing will show they are likely to develop a serious illness, or discover they carry a gene for one, such as cystic fibrosis. And one of the consequences could be that testing reveals that one or both parents aren’t the individuals named on their birth certificates, leaving them feeling like they aren’t who they thought they were. I say, bring it on. I want to know.

CHAPTER 14

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH DAD

> First you take a drink, then the drink takes a drink, then the drink takes you.
>
> — F. Scott Fitzgerald

> I get the sense that you're leading a meaningless life of quiet desperation.
>
> — Scott Adams (Dilbert)

Few men or women of my generation have escaped a brush with alcohol. I've known many people in my life who grew up around alcohol and gained an understanding of social drinking and the more or less ordinary use of alcohol. They might have had a few "adventures" with drinking too much, but after a hangover or two they understood the level of their tolerance for alcohol. They also didn't like feeling sick and hungover, and learned how to use alcohol, which is part of our society.

Some of us, in reality quite a large number of people, learned about alcohol in dreary and even tragic ways. We witnessed parents or other family members who used alcohol to excess, never learned their limits, and let alcohol control them. Nowadays, we recognize alcoholism and other addictions as true diseases, but not so much in my childhood. Sometimes, an awareness that something is off with an adult relative comes on gradually, and often the behavior is mystifying at best. At its worst, alcoholism touches everything.

NOT AN UNUSUAL STORY

I recall that my siblings and I thought it was exciting to go swimming, sometimes at the closest public swimming pool in Freeport, over ten miles away. But Elmer's Pond was much closer. This was not the kind of pristine swimming hole in the country depicted in the movies. This pond was an opaque, muddy, algae laden round bowl. As we walked into the water our feet disappeared into the muck. Still, on hot summer days this was a fun place for kids to splash around.

One day, Dad promised us kids that we'd go to this paradise after he got home from work. We eagerly waited for his arrival, and he was late, but eventually pulled in. My brother and sister and I were outside milling around when I sensed something was wrong. Ray and Sue clearly were nervous when Dad wasn't speaking or moving around in a normal way. Our trip to the pond looked tentative now, but I blurted, "We're still going to the pond, right?"

My siblings shushed me and I got the message. The pond trip was out for sure. Eventually, like my siblings, I saw the signs and recognized Dad had come home drunk, and that usually meant he was at the start of another binge. Anyone familiar with a binge drinker knows that pretty much anything can happen. Some people have "jolly" drunk stories to tell, but others mostly have the kind where the sick person just looks stupid and thoughtless at best, and at worst, violent and mean.

“CRAZY” DAD

When I think of certain events, they don’t retell very well. By that I mean that when people hear them, they tend to cringe because they aren’t a normal part of most people’s lives. One involves a dog of mine. I had a few dogs around in my childhood, and I have clear memories of a particular medium sized mutt. A nice dog. I would take it with me into the fields before dawn to help me get the cows into the barn for milking. The dog was helpful, but because animals on the farm were useful, but not pets, my attachment was more limited than we see with pets today. As I recall, the dog slept under the porch that was next to Mom and Dad’s room.

One night the dog was barking a lot for some reason. Dad got impatient with it, took out one of his guns and shot and killed it. I wasn’t so attached to the dog that it was like a family member, but I was sad. I also don’t recall anyone talking about the dog and what happened. Dad wasn’t the sort of person to have a debate with.

I thought I’d learned how to be careful around Dad, not only in what I said, but where I positioned myself in relation to him. But now and again, I’d have to relearn the lesson. One night before my freshman year in high school, I was crossing the living room to get to the stairway to go up to my bedroom. Dad was drunk, stretched out in his reclining chair in the living room. I think the sight of him like that annoyed me. Maybe I said something to rile him up or maybe just crossing in front of him set him off. As I was starting up the stairway I heard him coming after me, saying something like, “I’ll teach you a lesson for not saying good night to me.” I was trapped. No easy way out.

I panicked, and as I got to the top of the stairs I threw myself at him, barely thinking, like a cornered animal. We tumbled down the stairs. Miraculously at the bottom I was on top. I jumped up and dashed out of the house. I didn’t bother to stop to put my shoes on. I could hear him yelling, though. I kept running and made it almost two miles to Merle Horstmeier's farm. It was late in the evening, so I went up into the hayloft and slept on the hay.

In the morning when I heard typical farm noises, I went to find Merle. He was surprised to say the least and then, when I told his dad what happened, they let me stay with them for a week. That was one of the happier times for me as a young teenager. I was living in a sane family for once and was disappointed that I couldn't stay with them forever. But after a while Merle's dad, Marvin, turned me over to my dad and we never discussed what happened.

SOMETHING SHIFTS

Around my freshman year of high school Mom started leaving Dad and taking us with her. Looking back, I wonder if this started to happen after the cows were sold. It's curious to reflect on, but I felt more of a sense of responsibility for the cows than toward anything else. Cows suffer if their milking is delayed, even by an hour. They could develop mastitis and potentially die. I've thought that this early sense of responsibility might have caused an aversion to responsibility for the rest of my life.

One night after we'd left Dad, I snuck back to the farm, presumably to get something I'd left behind. I ran into him outside of the house where he was going through a pile of pills. This was not unusual because he also abused prescription drugs, something that wasn't commonly talked about. Once I saw him, I was careful not to get within reach of him, and fortunately I was faster than him. But I also kept an eye out for guns. He asked me where Mom was, but I said I wouldn't tell him. At that point, he threatened to take all of the pills if I didn't tell him. To me, given all that had happened, that was no threat at all. I didn't hesitate to tell him to go ahead and take the pills. It always gave me some satisfaction to say that to him, but unfortunately, at least for me at the time, he didn't follow through on his empty threats and take the pills.

Dad did eventually discover that we were staying with a family in Freeport, which was like taking a vacation. We didn't have cows to milk, and we could walk to a store or watch TV. None of us feared for our safety. However, one evening Dad came by with a gun and tools to break into the house. Our hosts called the police.

Dad was arrested for attempted murder. I felt better when he was in jail but couldn't entirely enjoy this freedom, because I'd think about him eventually being released. When I was called on to testify in court, they asked about drug use. There was plenty to talk about including the marijuana hanging up in the haymow. I don't recall what the outcome was, but I imagine he was probably released to a rehab facility.

One evening when I was about fifteen, I was at the dining room table playing chess with my friend Chuck Spelman, whose parents let him drive, although he didn't have a license yet. It was 8:00 or 9:00 in the evening. All of my family was around except Dad. Mom was in her easy chair in the living room next to the dining room.

I heard "drunk dad" coming home, making clumsy walking or stomping sounds and banging around. At some point, my drunk dad demanded that Mom fry some eggs for him. I don't know if Mom said no, or perhaps she was too slow to act. Dad stumbled into the living room and smashed a couple of eggs over Mom's head.

I jumped up to confront Dad, and before I knew it he hit me with a ferocious back hand. I must have lost consciousness for a moment. The next thing I remember was Sue jumping on Dad's back and trying to stab him with a kitchen knife. Someone, I'm not sure who, called the police. The police were soon there and took Dad away–a welcome relief. That was always a relief, but it never lasted long enough.

Years later I asked Chuck how he recalled the incident. When the “fertilizer hit the ventilator,” Chuck ran out and drove home. He was worried that the police would ask how he got there and he didn’t have his driver's license yet. It had bothered him for years that he didn’t do something. I tried to convince him that there wasn’t anything that he could have done. It’s interesting how people view the same scene and have different interpretations.

Typical Teenage Drinking

I went to schools in the Dakota district until my junior year of high school. Kindergarten was in Rock City, first through third grades in Davis, but the building isn’t there anymore. The rest of elementary school, junior high and my first two years of high school were in Dakota, junior year at Beloit Turner, then my final year at Orfordville Parkview High.

My first experience with drinking happened when I was about twelve years old. Our neighbor, Clifford Clark, was on a slow pitch softball team that played in Brodhead, Wisconsin. He started to take me to the games as a kind of extra in case they were short of players. I wasn’t any good at the game, but in a pinch they could make me the catcher. Since the ball was lobbed in and we didn’t steal bases, the catcher’s job was pretty simple.

After these games we always went to the Brodhead tap and drank beer with the guys. I climbed up on the round swivel bar stool next to Clifford. He ordered a beer. When the bartender asked me what I wanted, I told him I’d have a beer too. The bartender looked at me kind of funny, but Clifford said, “It’s okay, he’s with me.” So, I got a beer, and it didn’t take me long to finish it. One of my typical kid pastimes was spinning around on the bar stool. At some point in these revolutions, I noticed my glass was refilled, so I polished that one off, and so it went. My empty glass was refilled for the rest of the evening. When we left the bar, I walked out the back to the parking lot with Clifford, but I didn’t reach the car before throwing up in the parking lot. For some reason that was the only ill effect.

At the end of the softball season, Clifford hosted a party at the gravel quarry between his house and our house. This land had a large flat empty section in the middle and was surrounded by piles of gravel fifty feet high. Clifford supplied limitless kegs of cold beer, and I drank until I was completely drunk. The last thing I remember was running at one of the big gravel heaps. With the sloping sides I thought I could run right up those sides. Maybe I could do it sober, maybe not. When I got to the pile it seemed I ran into a gravel wall and passed out.

The next morning, I had one of the worst hangovers I would ever have in my life, possibly because I didn't throw up before going to bed. But that morning I threw up in between bouts of intense, painful stomach cramps. I thought I might die, and certainly wished I would. Mom prepared a mixture of milk and Pepto-Bismol, which eventually calmed my stomach. I'd survived to drink another day. It amazes me that I didn't get scolded, a lecture, or anything. Just another day in an alcoholic family.

Where I grew up, drinking was the main activity during our high school years. Sometimes, we got our hands on hard liquor and cheap wine, but we mostly consumed beer. Our big thing was road drinking, which involved filling up the trunk of a car with beer and then driving around till it was gone. Then we'd refill the trunk and do it again.

This drinking was stupid and crazy, and drunk driving accidents were frequent. At least three of my high school classmates, and we only had fifty or so kids in the class, were killed in car accidents. I was in a couple of minor accidents and my brother flipped his car once. It is surprising that more people didn't die. The relatively low population density must have saved many of us.

One night I had a campout at what we called the Iserman house with Merle and Chuck. I think we were fourteen years old. Dad had purchased one hundred acres from Bill Iserman when he retired from farming. The land included a barn, some other outbuildings, and an old house. The house was like the one my grandparents lived in, and had electricity and running water, but no indoor toilet. A cool water spring was located down the hill from the house, so I could cool the beer in the spring.

I arrived for our campout in our old red ‘57 pickup truck, Merle arrived on a mini-bike, and Chuck’s parents brought him to the spot. Merle and I had been drinking heavily before Chuck arrived. As he drove up we waved and called to him incoherently from an upstairs window. In hindsight I wonder why his parents went ahead and dropped him off.

Once when we were all together we had the great idea to go for a drive in my truck. All three of us were a couple of years too young for a driver’s license. At some point down a gravel road, we ran over a skunk, which we tossed in the back. We ended up at a girl’s house, a girl we liked to flirt with and tease. This was a bit like the song “spiders and snakes.” The three of us teased her with the skunk and threw it onto her roof. We were so very sophisticated. That was the highlight of the evening. We went back to the old house and slept it off. At our twenty-year high school reunion I apologized to the girl, who graciously accepted my apology.

During my junior year of high school, I often spent the night at Sue’s apartment in Davis, Illinois. My sister had moved out on her own and had a small one-bedroom apartment above the old Davis bank. On some of these occasions, I’d spent my evening playing poker with my friends. The highlight of one particular evening was an in-between pot going up to around $100. That was so high for us we had to pool our money to match the pot. After that, the game broke up and we started drinking even more heavily. The next morning, I woke up at Sue’s but didn’t remember how I got to her place, or where my truck was. This might have been the night that I got lost in her closet, desperately looking for the pot to puke in. No luck. I ended up throwing up all over my shirt.

Sue must have really loved putting up with me and these antics. Later in the morning a friend came by and dropped off my truck, which he'd borrowed to go get cigarettes.

The year that I spent at Beloit Turner, I drove back to Davis and Dakota to visit my friends every chance that I got. Hence, I made no friends in Beloit, Wisconsin. I decided to get off on a different foot in Orfordville and went out for football. Before school started we had practices and I was already making friends. One of my first friends was Dave Daniels, my future brother-in-law. He suggested going to Joe's White Elephant in Monroe, an eighteen-year-old beer bar. (At the time, in some states, like Wisconsin, drinking beer at age 18 was legal.) Neither one of us was eighteen but he'd borrowed an older kid's driver's license and draft card. Amazingly, we both got in. There was a band and we drank shorties, 7-ounce bottles of beer, all night. We both got plenty drunk. At one point at the end of a song, I set my bottle of beer in the air to free my hands for clapping. We both seemed amazed that the bottle crashed to the floor instead of staying where I'd put it.

One Saturday night I drove from our farm in Orfordville to Dakota to drink with my friends. I got so drunk I don't remember driving home. Along the way I crossed four lane highways without any recollection. The next morning my brother tried several times to wake me up. Eventually he tossed a bucket of water on me. I got up and dragged myself to the haymow to hide and sleep it off. When I eventually regained consciousness I looked for the car. It wasn't anywhere around the house. Our house was at least a hundred yards away from the highway. I eventually found it parked up by the highway. I have no memory of how I got from the car to my bedroom.

Although more information about alcoholism, along with its causes and treatments, is available, the disease itself isn't viewed in isolation, but rather is often linked to mental health conditions, and even early brain damage. Scientists have also shown that very young teens who drink so much they get drunk can also experience changes to the brain that impairs various kinds of brain function. Because of what I saw at home and my experiences of teen drinking, I've tended to be careful with alcohol, and drugs–something I'd recommend to every person. Fortunately, none of my siblings or children have suffered from alcoholism so hopefully, alcoholism has died out in our family.

> Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.
> — Leo Tolstoy

CHAPTER 15

RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

I respectfully decline the invitation to join your hallucination.
— Scott Adams (Dilbert)

I've spent more time in my life thinking about my responsibilities in life and to other people, and the planet, than I've spent considering religion in all its manifestations. When my family lived in Davis, Illinois, Mom would take us to the EUB (Evangelical United Brethren) church. Getting dressed up in fancy clothes and being bored was better than hanging out on the farm, so I went as often as I could.

I enjoyed Sunday school, where I got to read comic books–of the religious variety. We'd sing songs, and like so many other kids going to various Protestant churches, one was "Jesus Loves Me, This I Know" (next line, "For the bible tells me so"). Memorization challenges involved winning prizes, so were meant to entice us to read and memorize passages of the Bible. In one challenge we were told to memorize as many Bible verses as we could, and I rifled through the pages looking for the shortest ones.

Around the time I started junior high, I was "confirmed" into the church, meaning I made a commitment to be part of that EUB community and declare myself a Christian. The EUB church itself was formed in 1946 after the Evangelical Church and the Church of the United Brethren in Christ merged. Then, in 1968, the EUB merged with the Methodists and we were called United Methodists. Both sects had their roots in German speaking Protestant churches. My mother's family also had roots in the German speaking regions of Pennsylvania in the early 1800s.

By the time I was in high school I stopped going to church on a regular basis. Then, because Kay was a Catholic and we were to be married in a Catholic church, I had to do a couple of sessions of religious training with a priest. As I said elsewhere, the priest teaching the sessions took my challenges about bits of the Bible pretty well.

At the end of my high school years, I considered myself a Protestant Christian who believed in Jesus, but over the next few decades, I didn't think about religion much. I was more concerned about the number of conflicts around the world that seemed to be based on religion. It wasn't long before I began to think of myself as an agnostic. Maybe there was a God, maybe not. Maybe Jesus existed, but I thought there was a much simpler explanation for Jesus' beginning than the virgin birth. The years passed and by the time I was fifty, I had to acknowledge that I wasn't a Christian. I no longer believed that Jesus was the actual son of God.

In 2010, when Jane Lea and I moved to Elmhurst, Illinois, Emma started first grade. Jane Lea thought it would be good for all of us, but especially for Emma, to have a church experience. But what church? I definitely wasn't interested in a traditional Christian church, but Jane Lea's dad suggested the Unitarian Universalist church. We visited the church in nearby Oak Park, which had been designed by a member of the congregation, Frank Lloyd Wright.

Yes, the famous architect had once had a home and workshop in Oak Park and had designed the Unity Temple after the previous church burned down. In 2011, Jane Lea and I decided to join the Unitarian Universalist church, known as the UU church.

UU is not a Christian religion, and in fact, some famous evangelists, including the late Billy Graham considered Unitarians (and others, like Mormons and Quakers) to be members of cults, or at least not “real” Christians. The Unitarian part of UU holds that *if* there is a god, there is only one; the Universalist part says that *if* there is a heaven, everybody goes. There is no hell. UUs believe in “deeds not creeds,” and are more concerned with “life before death” than what happens afterward.

I particularly enjoyed the Chalice Circle that the congregation sponsored. These small groups got together periodically, and in our group in Oak Park, I still fondly recall the other members: Jim and Mary Parks, Matthew and Soon Har Lewis, Larry and Molly Klowden, Greg Risberg and Madeline Van Hecke, and Shirley Lundin. Rotating houses, we’d meet once a month to chat about a topic that the hosts selected, and also to talk about what was going on in our lives. I found it to be a great group of people. We participated more in the Chalice Circle than in Sunday services, which we attended about once a month. Emma went to Sunday school and that was enough of a church experience for us.

When we moved back to Del Mar in 2015, we didn’t seek out a church right away. It wasn’t until the 2016 presidential election went terribly wrong (Donald Trump’s electoral college win over Hillary Clinton) that I decided that I needed to get involved in some type of support organization, perhaps including a church. I joined the newly minted Torrey Pines Democratic club and became the endorsements chairperson. I also joined the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy and eventually became president of the board.

At the same time, our family started attending services at the

UU church in Solana Beach, where the congregation is quite liberal. They welcome people from different religions or people who don't believe in any type of god. They'd nominally welcome someone who'd voted for Donald Trump. Most likely, though, that person would likely be uncomfortable with the typical conversations and probably not stay for long. We visited sporadically, and Emma made more connections than we did through their youth programs. Now that Emma is essentially grown, no one in the family attends.

So, now, in 2023 when I'm writing this, I'm not involved with any religion. My substitute is reading books about living life and developing as a human being. I've recently read several that have enlightened me or stimulated my thinking in various ways: *The Stoic Challenge: A Philosopher's Guide to Becoming Tougher, Calmer, and More Resilient,* by William Irvine; *Nothing Special: Living Zen*, by Charlotte Joko Beck; *Man's Search for Meaning*, by Victor Frankl; *Tuesdays with Morrie,* by Mitch Albom; and *The Age of Reason,* by Thomas Paine. I also take yoga classes for mind and body. I exercise, and socialize with friends, family and likeminded people.

At this point, I don't believe in God, souls, or an afterlife in any religious sense. I totally support the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights written into the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees freedom of religion–and from religion. Believe whatever you want as long as you don't try to impose your beliefs on me.

As for the afterlife, I believe we live on through what we leave in our passing through life. I'd like my body to be composted so that I don't take up space or create more greenhouse gasses, but my body can nourish future generations of plants and animals. I'll live on through children and grandchildren. I'll live on through my interactions with people, organizations, and this memoir. For me, life has been rewarding, but a lot of work and I won't mind the rest.

My interest in the environment fits in with my notion of an afterlife. We should try to leave the planet better off than we found it. Unfortunately, we're using resources and burning fossil fuels at an unsustainable rate. Back in 1896, Svante Arrhenius made an accurate prediction on how much the global temperature would increase if we doubled the carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. So, this isn't new, it's just that we have the scale to affect the globe now. This motivated much of my retirement activity I describe in the next chapter. Jane Lea and I could also take some basic actions, such as outfitting our home with solar panels and driving an electric car.

We're living in a time where the role of science is somewhat diminished. Because of the internet, people can say whatever they want and people can choose to believe whatever they want. We have both more information at our fingertips as well as more disinformation and many people lack the ability to know which is which. The social media algorithms know that news that makes us angry makes us more engaged, hence, more money for the social media companies. This is driving us to polarized extremes. My hope is that this is just a phase that we will be able to cycle through and recover from.

Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound
source of spirituality.
— Carl Sagan

CHAPTER 16

LIFE IN RETIREMENT

* * *

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young.
– Henry Ford

The Earth is what we all have in common.
– Wendell Berry

From about the 1980s on, the term “self-actualization” was used to define a kind of ideal in life. It was based on Abraham Maslow’s pyramid, which described what became known as Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. It’s based on the idea that we have to take care of basic needs that form the bottom levels of the pyramid. Food, shelter, and clothing to keep us warm or cool would clearly be where every human being starts. As we move up the pyramid, we add work and social connections, community, love, family, and so forth. But many of us spanning the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have had the opportunity for higher education, careers of our choice, and the freedom to pursue interests and activities far beyond meeting basic needs. So, the top of the pyramid, where I have strived to be, is a state of self-actualization. A state of fulfillment. Taking piano and art lessons post-retirement, but still at a young age, were part of a quest to experience steps to explore what interested me and drew me to learn more, hence, self-actualization.

Self-Actualization And The Next Generation

My definition of self-actualization also includes using my time to focus on something bigger than myself, which is part of the hierarchy of needs. For me, retirement has meant volunteerism, especially around environmental issues.

In 2010, around the time of my family's year in Provence, my friend Dennis Mudd, had the idea to create a database of all of California's native plants. In doing so, we'd encourage their use. The website would be called calscape.com, and users could enter an address and get information about native plants that naturally grow in their area. The site would include planting information about sun, soil, pH level, photos of the plant, butterflies and other pollinators that rely on species, a map of the plant's native range, where to buy it, and much more. Dennis focused on gathering information about the plants, and I did the programming.

I'm an amateur programmer, but over the years I've done small projects using many different programming languages. This was my biggest project to date. I was amazed that the tools and almost all of the data I used were available for free. I decided to divide up the state of California into square miles, of which there are nearly 200,000. Each square had a longitude and latitude to place it on a Google map. Over a couple of years of working with Dennis, we associated each of the roughly six thousand California plants with the squares that they would live in.

So, when users typed in their addresses, I'd first query Google to get the latitude and longitude of the address, and then look into the database to find which plants were associated with that address.

For any plant the user wanted to look at, I could shade an area on the Google map with all of the square miles that the plant lived in. In 2014 we donated Calscape.com to the California Native Plant Society. The site has been visited millions of times and is probably the most visited site in California for native plant information. This was my first activity related to the environment.

When we remodeled our home in Del Mar Heights, I had the lawn removed and the yard was filled with native plants. In the early days, about as many died as survived but the survival rate has improved over the years. In 2021, *Coastal,* a local magazine, (Coastal Magazine), featured a nice article about our yard. In April 2024, our yard was on the California Native Plant Society's Garden Tour. Over four hundred people toured our collection of native plants. Besides attracting the reptiles, birds, and butterflies to our yard, people appreciate it too.

In terms of a commitment to a cause and volunteerism, I took another big step after the disastrous 2016 presidential election. Like many millions of others, I think I was clinically depressed for weeks after Trump won the presidency. Then I went to the hope stage, hoping it wouldn't be so bad, but over his tumultuous four years, he and the people surrounding him were much worse than I'd even imagined it would be. Trump's first election will go down in history as the beginning of the end of democracy in the United States.

After I uncurled from my fetal position in early 2017, I became part of the local Torrey Pines Democratic Club and joined its board as chair of endorsements, which has given me a larger role in determining the local candidates we have to choose from.

As an aside, many voters find local politics boring and only follow the more dramatic and exciting national politics. Big mistake. We have as much influence on who becomes the next president as we do over who wins the football game on TV. Local politics, such as the school board and city council, is where the real action is. These positions affect us and we can have a noticeable influence on who wins. In many cases, people who win local races go on to higher office, even the presidency.

As endorsement chairperson for the Torrey Pines Democratic Club, I've organized debates between Todd Gloria, the eventual mayor of San Diego, and his opponents. Although our club is fairly small, elected officials at all levels come to talk to us, from our representatives in Congress, and those serving in the California State Senate and Assembly, along with city council, school board members, judges, and more.

Diana Aquirre, the founder of the club, informed members that the San Dieguito High School District needed a candidate. I suggested that Jane Lea would be an excellent choice, and in 2022, she was elected as a school board trustee. Since then, she has been making a meaningful impact on the district and was voted by her fellow trustees to serve as vice president of the board.

In terms of the environment, I looked across the street at Crest Canyon. I happened to go on a hike in Crest Canyon led by Trish Boaz, the former Director of the San Dieguito River Valley Conservancy (SDRVC). From there I participated in other SDRVC events. Then Jane Lea decided to take their program, Exploring your Sense of Place (ESP), and I joined, too. ESP is sort of an educational hiking program, led by experts in various topics, through several areas of the San Dieguito River Valley. At the end of 2018, the hike administrators unexpectedly quit the program at the end of the year, and starting in 2019, Jane Lea and I became the program's administrators.

At about the same time I joined the SDRVC board of directors, eventually becoming board president from 2021 to 2023. The SDRVC has the mission of educating the public about the San Dieguito River Valley watershed, protecting the land, and encouraging recreation. Their signature project is the Coast to Crest Trail, a seventy-one-mile trail from the beach in Del Mar to the top of Volcan Mountain near Julian, California. As of 2023, fifty miles have been completed. In 2023 we raised over $2 million for the design and permitting of the last two big gaps in the trail. The Coast to Crest Trail should be completed before 2030. Then there will be more to do in setting up camp sites, bed and breakfast stops, as well as a short connection to the more famous Pacific Crest Trail. After six years on the board, I termed out, and am now on the advisory board.

I sit on the Citizens Advisory Committee for the San Dieguito River Valley JPA (Joint Powers Authority) as a representative of the Torrey Pines Community Planning Board. Other environmental endeavors have included leading clean-up events in Crest Canyon for San Diego Canyonlands. I'm also a member of the local California Native Plant Society.

In 2022, I took up a new activity and joined the San Diego Community Forest Advisory Board (CFAB), which advises the San Diego mayor, city council, staff, and other departments about trees. I was nominated by our city council representative, Joe LaCava, and then voted on by the San Diego city council. Just six months after I joined, the long-time and very knowledgeable former board chair, Anne Fege, termed out, and the board voted for me to replace her as chair. As a result, CFAB has begun to take the bulk of my volunteer hours. Urban forestry is getting more popular as a way to provide cooling shade, sequester carbon, clean the air, and improve property values, along with being a calming influence.

The last board I served on was the Torrey Pines Community Planning Board, where I held the position of treasurer from 2020 to 2023. The board serves as a platform for residents and business owners in our community to voice suggestions or concerns to the city of San Diego. While the experience was somewhat engaging, it ultimately didn’t capture my sustained interest, and I chose not to seek reelection when my term ended.

On the social side of things, Jane Lea and I have recently begun playing pickleball with friends. The game is a cross between tennis and ping pong, invented as a children's game in 1965. In 2023 it was the fastest growing game in the US. It is as demanding a game as you make it and you don’t have to be great at it to have fun. My last new sport?

Retirement has been a journey of self-actualization, allowing me to pursue personal interests, environmental advocacy, and civic engagement. From co-creating Calscape.com and transforming my yard with native plants to serving on boards and supporting local politics, I’ve found fulfillment in making meaningful contributions to my community while continuing to grow and learn.

Jim, Coco, Jane Lea, and Lily at the Petrified Forest National Park.

All politics is local.
– Tip O’Neill

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jim Smith was born in 1953 and raised on a small dairy farm in rural Illinois, where he learned the values of hard work and resilience amid challenging family circumstances. Drafted during the Vietnam War era, his life took a pivotal turn that eventually led him to earn a master's degree from Stanford University and succeed as an entrepreneur in California. A lifelong learner, world traveler, and passionate genealogist, Jim wrote *From Fields to Fulfillment* to preserve his story for future generations and reflect on a life shaped by struggle, growth, forgiveness, and unexpected good fortune.